

Summary

Harry has lost the magical protection that he had living with his relatives. He inherits Grimmauld place and spends his summer there. Tonks and Ginny Weasley volunteer to keep him company and train for the summer. Harry is presented with a number of options and must make appropriate choices that will have lasting ramifications on the wizarding world.

Timeframe

The story takes place during July and August of 1996, the summer between 5th and 6th year.

Introduction

The wizarding world began changing immediately after the news of what had happened on Friday 28 June in the Department of Mysteries began to spread. Minister of Magic Fudge who had been on thin ice politically before the news, felt his support cracking all around him. His most visible supporter, Lucius Malfoy was found out to be a senior Death Eater and was currently sitting in a holding cell along with ten of his cohorts. Fudge had publicly denied the existence of Voldemort for the last year, slandering the voices of Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter in the process. In the face of indisputable evidence he was forced to publicly reverse his position and offer very painful public apologies. If that wasn't bad enough, his support of Delores Umbridge was found to have gone very, very bad. While he managed to keep her attempt at casting an unforgivable curse at Harry Potter quiet, her other abuses of power quickly came to light. Unless something happened, Fudge was likely in his last month in office. Meanwhile Dumbledore had been quietly reinstated as head of the wizarding court system, the Wizengamot, as well as his return as headmaster of Hogwarts. By the time school had ended for the term, charges were being filed against Umbridge, who had left Hogwarts the day before, and not been heard of since.

A piece of the story that had not yet been widely told was that of Sirius Black. Dumbledore had made a complete deposition to Director Bones, but was still trying to get Black's name cleared. His death had been officially recorded, but without Pettigrew physically in custody, dead or alive, there was insufficient evidence to publicly exonerate

him. Interestingly enough, as there had been no trial, there was nothing to officially pardon him of.

Story

Chapter 1

Wednesday - 3 July

After depositing her school trunk into her room, Ginny Weasley went out to the back garden at the burrow and thought about the things that had happened in the last week. Her brother Ron and their friends Luna, Hermione, Neville, and Harry had survived a deadly encounter with the Death Eaters at the Ministry of Magic building. As she understood it, Harry and Professor Dumbledore had even faced Voldemort himself in the lobby.

Each of the participants from the battle had been injured to various degrees, Ginny the least with a broken ankle. Madam Pomfrey had mended her as well as Luna, and Neville in a matter of minutes. Ron had been counter jinxed to wear off the inebriation spell. He had been told that the scars from the brain creatures would take another week to clear up. Hermione had been injured the worst. She had been slashed by a weakened flame cutter curse and would also take another week to heal.

Ginny's thoughts lay with a raven haired, slightly built, emerald-eyed wizard. She'd had a varying relationship with Harry Potter over the years – an obsessed little sister, a helpless maiden needing rescue, a year or so of being ignored, and finally a friendship based not on her being someone's sister, instead simply being herself. Her concern at the moment had nothing to do with wayward thoughts of Harry, rather a genuine concern for his well-being.

Harry had emerged that night after a long visit in Dumbledore's office a changed person. While not physically injured, it was obvious to anyone who knew him that he was hurting badly. Certainly he was reacting and greatly affected by his Godfather's death. Certainly he felt grief over the loss and excessive guilt for having taking actions that allowed it to happen. However there was something else – Harry

was acting like the weight of the world had been piled onto his shoulders. Hermione had noticed it as well, but she had her own problems to deal with, as well as Ginny's whining wanker brother incessantly asking her for advice about Luna Lovegood. Ginny made a promise to herself to be there for Harry.

That Saturday Ginny asked her Mum for permission to go and see Harry. She used the floo to get to Mrs. Figg's house and walked the two blocks to number 4 Privet Drive. Ginny saw Tonks lurking at the edge of the fence guarding the house. "Watcher Ginny?"

"Hello Tonks. Is Harry home?"

Tonks smiled at Ginny, knowing that the young woman had spunk. "Go on in. The people that he lives with are all gone for the weekend. She pointed to the window on the upper left corner of the house. Harry's room is up there. I expect he is still moping around. Try and get him to come out if you can. Maybe you could get him to go to the park down the street. It is a lovely day to be out."

Ginny walked in the door. She had never been to Harry's house before. Looking around, it didn't look like her expectation of Harry's house. It certainly didn't look anything like her parent's home. Everything was stacked up neatly looking like the occupants were afraid to touch anything. There were family pictures on the walls and bookshelves. Ginny noticed two things - The people in the pictures weren't moving, and Harry wasn't in a single picture. She remembered Hermione saying that his aunt or uncle did not really want him there. She walked up the steep stairway to the second floor and down the short hallway to Harry's room. There were at least a half dozen locks in the door as well as a cat flap at the bottom.

Harry was lying on his bed staring blankly at his transfiguration book. He had not heard Ginny open the door. She softly knocked on the doorframe. "Hi Harry. Can I come in?"

Harry's eyes light up at the sight of his friend. "Hi Ginny. I'm happy to see you."

Ginny looked at Harry. He looked like a mess. It was not obvious that he had eaten, bathed or even slept since he had returned to Privet drive three days before.

“Harry, why don’t you finished getting dressed, and we can go for a walk outside. Tonks said that there is a park not too far away. Come on. You’ll feel better if you get up. I’ll wait outside with Tonks. Go take a shower and I’ll see you in five minutes.”

She gave him a quick hug and walked down the stairs. After closing the door, she told Tonks that he looked terrible, and most likely had not eaten or slept in several days. A few minutes later Harry walked out the door. In the sunlight he looked even worse, pale and thin in his ill-fitting, ragged, hand-me-down clothes. Ginny took his hand and the three of them walked down Privet Drive and over to Wisteria way to get to the park.

Tonks discretely conjured a blanket for the two of them to sit on, and walked a comfortable distance away to allow them to visit.

“So did you miss me the last few days?”

Harry looked into Ginny’s bright brown eyes. “Yes, as a matter of fact I did miss you Ginny. I am so lonely here. I’m really not supposed to leave the house for more than a few hours a day to strengthen the magic that helps protect me by living with my relatives.”

Noticing Harry’s attention, Ginny brushed her long auburn hair out of her eyes. “So what you’re saying is that I could come over most any day, and we could have lunch together. Right?” She gave Harry a not entirely wholesome smile. “I also think that means that we could go to Diagon Alley together if we brought one of the Order guards along with us, and didn’t stay too long. Right? It probably also means that you could come over and visit for a part of an afternoon if I didn’t keep you too long. Right? Harry you would be doing me a huge favor if we could spend some time together this summer. Ron is spending every waking moment with Luna and they’re both going to work at the joke shop for the holiday. I’d rather spend time with you. I know that you probably would have to write Professor Dumbledore and get his

advice first, but I really would like to be with you, if you would be willing to keep me company?"

Tonks walked over. "I'll save you the embarrassing letter loverboy, and quietly ask Dumbledore tonight when I see him. I'll find out how long the leash really is and try and figure out how to give you some breathing room."

Harry looked more than a bit relieved. The two women walked him back. Ginny said good-bye and entered Mrs. Figg's house. Tonks and Harry continued their walk. "No one is trying to cramp your style Harry. I'll talk with the Professor and have a good answer for you tomorrow."

"Thanks Tonks. I've got some reading to do, and a few letters to write. Thanks again."

She looked at him and smiled. "No problem, kiddo." Her hair changed from red to purple.

She watched as he closed the door. She had received the unusual request the day before from Director Bones to keep an eye out for Death Eaters that might be in the vicinity of Little Winging. She took it to mean that she had received department sanction to complete Dumbledore's request that Harry's Aunt's home (specifically Harry himself) have a constant guard. The young man had grown a lot in the last year. She had met him a few times in the last couple years. His tantrums last summer had been a nightmare to put up with. Now he seemed a lot older than the last summer. Her friend Hestia who watched Harry's home at night had observed that some teenagers just seemed to have 'old souls.' That observation seemed to have applied to Harry.

Her thoughts returned to the Department of Mysteries. Harry and those five kids had managed to hold their own against a dozen of the toughest Death Eaters and had beaten half of them during the battle. Unfortunately they had not known how to properly capture a downed opponent, and the Death Eaters that they had managed to stun had been continuously revived by the others. She wasn't sure if it was through dumb luck or amazing leadership that none of the teenagers had been killed.

The thing that Nymphadora found curious was Dumbledore's reluctance to explain exactly why Harry needed to have a constant guard. As head of the Order, he was usually quite forthcoming when it came to explaining the reasoning and purpose behind the various duties and missions that they were volunteering for. She certainly didn't mind keeping an eye on him twelve hours a day five days a week, but was a bit surprised when she had been officially stationed at his house for a month.

Unknown to Tonks, Dumbledore had been amazingly tight lipped regarding the prophecy. The only people who knew it in its entirety were himself and Harry Potter. Obviously Voldemort had learned the first two lines accounting for his actions in 1981 murdering Harry's parents, but even that part was not widely known.

A few minutes later Harry walked out with two plates, and cokes. "It didn't look like you had brought anything to eat. Are sandwiches and crisps OK?"

"Thank you Harry. That was very thoughtful of you." Tonks looked at him for a moment and thought that he might be finally be growing up a bit

Mrs. Weasley smiled at her daughter when she returned home. "How was your visit dear?"

"It was OK. Harry was pretty depressed about what happened at the Department of Mysteries. He was just sitting in his room staring at a book. Auror Tonks took us to the park by his house. I think it was good for Harry to get out of the house and get some sun. I told him that I would visit him again tomorrow. You don't mind if I go visit do you?"

Molly smiled at her daughter. She would like nothing more than for Harry Potter to take notice of her Ginny. "Of course not dear. Run along, and enjoy your afternoon."

Ginny walked out the back door and sat by the stream that flowed near their home. She thought about all of the people that she knew. Harry alone had saved her life not once, but twice. The only thing Dean Thomas had done was to try and grope her on the train ride home last week, effectively ending that relationship before it had even started. She recognized that Harry had always stood by her side when she needed help. She sensed that at this time, he was in need of help, and she was happy to offer whatever comfort he might need.

At ten the next morning, Ginny used the floo to get to Mrs. Figg's house. She met Harry and Tonks in the back garden of 4 Privet Drive. Harry was rushing to finish weeding the garden. Tonks helped Harry finish, and he went in for a few minutes to get cleaned up. "Hi Ginny. It's good to see you again. Harry got up early so he could finish his house chores to spend time with you. It's great to see him out of his room. I talked with the Professor last night. He said that Harry shouldn't be gone for more than four hours in a day and asked that he doesn't keep going to the same place. How about an afternoon in Diagon Alley?"

Ginny was delighted at the news. "That sounds great. Thank you very much. I'd really like that."

Harry came back outside and they left to go to Mrs. Figg's House. From there they used the floo to get to the fireplace at Gringotts. Harry had some banking business that needed taking care of. Ginny and Tonks offered to wait in the lobby as his finances really weren't their business. Harry said that wasn't necessary. He waited in line at the counter and handed the goblin his key. The old goblin looked at it closely and said, "Mr. Potter, when you are done visiting your vault, please see Ragnok the Head Goblin. He has some papers for you to look at and sign."

"Yes sir. Could Griphook take us please?"

The old goblin was quite surprised. Rarely did a wizard bother to remember a goblin's name, and those that did invariably mistakenly placed a Mr. in front of it. "Griphook." The goblin walked to the teller from one on the other areas. "Please show Mr. Potter and his companions to his vault."

The four of them got into one of the carts. Ginny had rarely been to the Weasley family vault and Tonks took the time to explain that there were vaults of varying sizes – the smaller vaults in the upper levels were set up for students. Lower down were the regular vaults, lower still were the old family vaults and finally relatively few of the high security vaults were at the very deepest levels. Harry's was not in the student section, as both women would have expected, rather one of the larger vaults.

Harry wanted to withdraw enough money so that he could buy himself some decent clothes to wear. He did not want to spend another summer wearing impossibly large cast offs and sweatshirts that would be better suited for Umbridge than himself. He withdrew 5,000 Galleons, more than Tonks or the Weasleys combined had in their vaults. She only made 5,500 Galleons a year as a third year Auror. Neither woman said anything, but Tonks noticed that the balance parchment for Harry's vault read 255,000 Galleons after he had made his withdrawal! It occurred to her that being an orphan, and living as an unwelcome guest in his aunt's home he had probably never had physical access to any of his funds. No teen would want to go around wearing the rags that she had invariably seen him in. She looked again and realized that he probably didn't even own a decent pair of shoes. His old trainers were taped together. She would take him to Harrods the next time they went out.

When they got back to the lobby, Tonks was surprised to see Aurors Kingsley, and Hestia waiting in the lobby. Hestia saw her and waved them over. "Hello Tonks. Mr. Potter, you will need to come with us please."

Harry had no idea what they wanted. "I have an appointment with one of the goblins right now. Can I go with you in a few minutes?"

Hestia shook her head, "I'm sorry. You'll need to come now Mr. Potter. Tonks please meet us in Director Bones' office after you have advised the goblins that Mr. Potter will have to reschedule."

"I'll go with Harry," said Ginny.

A sense of dread came over Harry. What if they had found out that he had used an unforgivable curse against Bellatrix that night in the lobby? Would he be thrown into a cell with Malfoy or one of the other Death Eaters? Ginny could sense Harry tensing up, but wasn't sure of the reason.

"What's up?" she whispered.

"I don't know," he whispered back.

They got to Director Bones office. It was surprisingly businesslike, not cluttered with foe glasses, sneakoscopes, or old photos or awards like Harry would have expected based on his experience with Moody. Harry was unsurprised to see Professor Dumbledore there but quite surprised to see Mrs. Weasley. She was looking deathly nervous. The only time he remembered seeing her look anywhere near this nervous was that time in Professor McGonagall's office when they had all been in the chamber of secrets and everyone thought that Ginny had been killed. She saw them and pulled them both into a bone-crushing hug. "Harry, I'm so glad to see you. We were so worried."

Looking totally confused, Harry asked, "What's up?"

Amelia said, "Harry I don't have an easy way to tell you this. Your aunt, uncle, and cousin were attacked on the M4 motorway this morning. Their car rolled over and blew up. Based on what we have been able to learn from witnesses, they were attacked by muggles. I'm sorry." In sixty years in magical law enforcement, she had never found an easy way of telling someone that their family had been murdered.

Chapter 2

Professor Dumbledore told Harry that Tonks, Hestia, and Kingsley would take him to Privet Drive where he should collect his belongings. He would be taken to Grimmauld place where he would spend the rest of the summer.

"I don't like that place," said Harry.

Professor Dumbledore looked at his troubled young friend. "No, I didn't think that you would be overly fond of it. However, it now belongs to you. I have asked Director Bones to grant you a provisional magical license, partly due to your status as an unattached minor, partly for your own safety, and partly to allow you to use magic to remodel the house into something that is more pleasing to you. Did you have the opportunity to visit the goblins before you were collected to come here?"

Tonks shook her head.

Dumbledore nodded. "I see. Then you should make arrangements to return to Gringotts immediately after we are done here."

Professor Dumbledore considered his words for a moment. "Miss Weasley, your mother said that you might be willing to stay there as well to keep Mr. Potter company for the summer. Auror Tonks will be guarding the house. As such, Director Bones has also granted you a provisional magic license for the summer. You both will receive training for several hours each day. I do not want to repeat the mistake of forcing you to be locked up for the summer. We will find a way to let you out once a week. I will also send Dobby and Winky along to help you. They may be of great use in cleaning up your home, shopping, and remodeling it to your taste. Please accept this offer."

Harry looked at Ginny. "You don't have to do this you know."

Ginny was a bit hurt at his words, but realized that Harry wasn't sending her away, just giving her an option. "I'd be happy to if you wouldn't mind my being there. I promise I won't be a bother."

Harry turned a bit red. "Thanks. You could never be a bother."

Dumbledore let them finish. "As long as you're out right now, and we are in central London, you may want to do some shopping after you conclude your business at Gringotts. Can we meet back here at four? That is six hours from now. I will work out some of the details with Director Bones, and portkey you to your home.

They spent about an hour at Gringotts. It turned out that Griphook was one of the Goblins that handled the estate transfers. As such, Ragnot assigned him to be Harry's personal banker. Griphook explained that the Black estate currently consisted of the property at Grimmauld place, investments, a smaller property in Ireland, and some cash in the vault. Given the difficulties of Black's legal status, most of the business partnership investments had been quietly liquidated in the last year or so. Griphook was uncertain of the personal property and household goods at Grimmauld place, but advised Harry that Sirius had made several substantial withdrawals in the last year. He recommended contacting Mr. Mundungus Fletcher, who specialized in the liquidation of large wizarding estates. He also recommended that Harry secure the advice of several trusted witches or wizards before deciding which if any household items to sell or dispose of.

He gave Harry a summarized listing of the Black estate

Property

Grimmauld Place – London

Westbury Road – Cork

Investments

25 interest in Nimbus Corporation

5 interest in St. Andrew Old Course Hotels Ltd

Cash – 20,000 Galleons

In all honesty, Harry was a bit surprised; first that Sirius had so little cash in his account. Not that he expected, wanted, or even needed the money; he simply assumed that the Black estate would have been a bit larger. Harry hoped that the property in Cork was a bit less gloomy than Grimmauld Place. Harry was also surprised to know that he now owned part of a racing broom company. He would make use of that later.

Finally Griphook presented the papers that Dumbledore, and Bones had previously signed, stating that Harry would become an emancipated minor. In other words, rather than become a ward of a wizarding orphanage, Harry was now considered a legal adult. He could sign contracts, and had all of the privileges and responsibilities of an adult wizard. He could test for an apparition license, a driver's license, or anything that he wanted to do. Griphook asked if Harry had any questions. Curious, Harry asked if his own parents had written a Will like Sirius had. Griphook said that he didn't know, but would check into it for him, and let him know within a week.

Asking what else he could do to help Harry immediately, Harry asked him to transfer the contents of the Black vault into his own, withdrew another 5,000 Galleons and converted them to 22,000 Pounds Sterling. On the way out, Tonks poked him in the side and said, "Harry, it's not really my business, but that is a lot of cash to be carrying around. Did you have something specific in mind, or did you just want an obscene amount of walking around money?"

Harry felt a bit embarrassed over having taken so much money with him. "Both actually. I lived most of my life with less than two quid in my pocket, and now I need to do quite a bit of shopping."

"OK Harry. We have about five hours left until we need to get back. We can probably get everything that we need at Harrods. Seeing as you have a bit of cash burning a hole in your pocket, Ginny and I will be happy to help you spend it." Both women looked at Harry with lusty grins on their faces, then winked at him. In the cab ride over to Harrods, she gave them both printed business cards. "Have everything that you purchase delivered to this address. It will get delivered to us within a day."

“OK.” Neither Harry nor Ginny had ever been to Harrods. Indeed, Harry had rarely been to any store in the non-magical world other than to carry packages that his aunt had gotten for Dudley. In the cab ride over, Harry handed Tonks two thousand Pounds of his money, and asked that she get Ginny everything that she would need. A second later, he handed her a second portion and asked that she get herself anything that she would need as well. They both agreed to meet back after an hour.

Neither woman had ever had anywhere near this much money to use for a one day shopping spree. Ginny had received comparatively few new items in her life, and felt guilty about it until Tonks assured her that Harry was quite wealthy, and simply was trying to be nice, giving them the things that they would need for the stay. Once the guilt had vanished, both women had a fantastic time trying on and selecting every style of clothing from pretty knickers to sweat sox.

Harry found his way to the young men’s area and was quickly helped by a very attractive young woman. Harry explained that he needed more or less everything, and that he liked darker colors. She had a bit of fun with him measuring him all over and started working. An hour later, he had several large packages with four oxford shirts, several casual shirts, two sweatshirts, two sets of workout clothing, three pair of blue and black jeans, shorts, several belts, casual slacks, a dozen pair of white and dark sox, boxers, Doctor Martins, black loafers, two pair of trainers, and two pair of silk pajamas. Harry liked the choices that she had made. He gave the young woman the address to send the items to, and paid her. He thanked her for helping him with the selections. She smiled at him. “No problem, luv. You’ll look fantastic in your new things. If you have a few more minutes, perhaps you would like to get a suit for more formal occasions.” Harry agreed, and five minutes later was chalked up. She picked out a slate gray three-button suit that he looked very good in, and a tie. Last but not least, she found a stainless steel Breitling Windrider watch for him, assuring him that it kept good time and was waterproof. His wallet considerably lighter, she thanked him again, and he met up with Tonks and Ginny who both seemed absolutely delighted with their selections.

Harry asked Tonks if there were any household items that they would need. She was sure that there were several pieces of furniture that they would need, but suggested that they hold off until they look the place over and get things sorted out. She suggested that he purchase a cell phone and several spare batteries. Harry bought them a nice lunch at Tom's, sitting in a back room. After lunch they went to Flourish and Bots to get their schoolbooks, a few other books that Tonks suggested, more parchment and a few other items. Harry insisted that Ginny pick out an owl, both because he wanted to get her one, but also because Tonks had pointed out that Hedwig was very easy to spot. Again they gave the address to have the items shipped. Finally Harry bought six cases of butterbeer from Tom.

While Tonks, Harry and Ginny were getting new clothing, Dumbledore and Amelia were compiling a list of suspects in the murder of Harry's relatives. Dumbledore voiced his opinion that he considered it unlikely that the Dursleys themselves were the targets. Rather he thought it more likely that the assassin mistakenly believed that Harry would have been accompanying them. Bones suggested that Healer Pomfrey pay Harry a visit in a few days to check up on him

Finally it was time to meet up with Dumbledore. He had made them a portkey to get them from Privet Drive to Grimmauld place, and made certain that Harry had the key to the Black house. While Ginny and Harry were ordering a few last items from Tom, Dumbledore advised Tonks that aside from Dobby, Winky, Pomfrey, and Remus, they should expect no visitors for at least the next few weeks.

The four of them used a portkey to get into the empty living room at Privet Drive. Dumbledore advised Harry to be certain to take all of his belongings, as he would not be returning. Dumbledore looked at the faded shade on the window in Harry's bedroom, the rags in his closet, and the worn out bedspread on his little bed, and felt ashamed for the way that Harry's relatives had treated him. Aside from his Hogwarts items the only thing Harry took with him was a photo of himself and Dudley taken a few days after the dementor attack last summer. Harry sent Hedwig to Hermione, explaining what had happened, and asking that she send Hedwig to Hogwarts for the holidays with a note to McGonagall asking about seventh year transfiguration reading

materials. After Harry sent Hedwig on her way, Dumbledore shrunk her cage, and Harry placed it in his trunk. Next he shrunk Harry's trunk, so that it fit into his pocket. In the kitchen, Harry inexplicably opened the cupboard under the stairway and stared into it for a full minute before closing the door. No one said a word as they watched him close a chapter of his life. Finally he said, "I'm ready." Wishing the three of them luck, Dumbledore activated the portkey that they were holding. A moment later Tonks, Harry and Ginny were standing inside the car park behind Grimmauld place.

Harry opened the envelope that Dumbledore had just given him and read the parchment. He placed the silver key into the lock of the door and said, "I Harry Potter take possession of this house." He opened the door and the three of them walked in. If Harry thought that the house was run down and dirty the previous summer, it was nothing like the dusty condition that it was in now.

Looking around, it occurred to Harry that his life had changed forever. His life with the Dursleys had never been warm or loving, but it was what he had known. Tears welled in his eyes. Tonks was looking around, but Ginny had been watching Harry closely. Not wanting to overstep, she walked up behind him and gave him a quick hug. "Thanks for a really fun day Harry. Let's look around for a bit."

Harry took a steadying breath and said, "Thanks Ginny. I'll catch up in a minute. I need to finish reading this note from Dumbledore." He sat down on a wooden bench.

"OK. I'll be in the kitchen."

Harry read the note.

Dear Harry,

Enclosed please find two keys for your home. The larger silver key will unlock the door. After you place the key in the lock, say "I Harry Potter take possession of this house." That will give you control over all of the wards within the house, except for the Fildious charm that I cast to keep the home hidden. Should you need to let someone in for

the first time, show them the slip of parchment that I had you place in your wallet.

Number 12 Grimmauld place is part of a row of brownstone brick buildings built about 1900. The neighborhood itself appears safe. Most of the units have been subdivided over the years to allow them to be affordable to the younger families that make up most of your neighbors. (Then again, relative to me, almost everyone seems younger) There is a grocery store along with some shops, smaller restaurants and an American restaurant, Pizza Hut 2-3 blocks to the west of your building.

I asked Amelia to quietly disconnect the fireplace from the floor network. I created several portkeys and left them on the first floor fireplace mantle for your use. Their respective destinations are marked. Tapping them twice with your wand can activate them. I recommend that you position them around your home for emergency use after you have sorted out the place.

Harry I want to tell you how much I now regret placing you with your Aunt fifteen years ago. While she kept you alive and protected in her care, I have come to realize that you deserved so much more. Once I placed you there, I lost most rights to interfere. I had so hoped that she would have provided you the love that you deserved. I am truly sorry. I am certain that Molly or any number of families would have willingly taken you in. I simply say that they were very dangerous times, and I needed to act quickly. I observe that you are the most well grounded young man that I have ever met in terms of values, courage, and self-discipline. I am proud to call you my friend.

As you rummage through your home, please consider categorizing your belongings into five categories:

Items that you wish to keep

Items that you wish to give away

Items that you wish to have sold

Items that you wish to vanish

Potentially dangerous or dark objects

Please do not feel obligated to keep anything that you do not like, or does not suit you. Sirius felt no attachment to 95 of the items in the house. His ancestors acquired them, not him. The Gringotts estate banker may have mentioned that Mundungus can sell any of the items for you and get a good price at a very reasonable fee. The smaller key will open any of the locks within the home. I have made arrangements to have Kreacher brought to Hogwarts tomorrow.

Dobby and Winky have both asked me if they could go and work for you. Of course you have my blessing in this matter, but it is not needed. They are free elves. I believe they would be very happy working for you. One or two Galleons a week is as much remuneration as they would accept. If you take them in, please insist that one of the rooms be theirs, so they do not gravitate to the boiler or laundry room for their sleeping quarters, as is their nature. In the event Miss Granger visits you, you will be much happier having done so.

Last, and if you believe that I am overstepping my bounds as your friend, I apologize in advance. Molly placed an extraordinary amount of trust in you, charging you with the care of her only daughter. I know that you will treat Miss Weasley with the respect that she deserves.

Your friend,

Albus

Harry considered Dumbledore's words carefully. Of course he would keep Ginny safe. She was his friend. Dobby and Winky might be able to do wonders in this place. Kreacher certainly hadn't. What would Hermione think? Was there anything wrong with employing someone? Harry didn't think so. He wondered what it was that house elves could really do? He would have to ask Dobby and Winky sometime. He went into the kitchen to find Tonks and Ginny.

The kitchen was in the best condition of the rooms that he had visited. It had an oak rectangular table that easily seated ten people. Being

an old wizarding house, there was no electricity. The home used the old style gas lights for lighting. As a result, the home was dark, gloomy, and the ceilings were blackened by years of soot from the lamps. The gas stove in the kitchen worked normally. The old icebox was enchanted never to need ice. Part of it would keep food frozen, the other part was just above freezing, similar to the electric refrigerator on Privet Drive. The kitchen itself was quite spacious. There were glasses, stainless flatware, stoneware, cookware, and mugs that had been purchased recently, probably for use by the Order, as there was service for twenty-four.

Tonks, Harry, and Ginny collectively wrote a grocery list – Orange juice, bacon, sausages, coffee, Diet Pepsi, tea, cocoa, soups, vegetables, lettuce, fresh fruits, pasta, sauce, meats, canned items, butter, breads, popcorn, salt, soap, shampoo, and the like filled it out. Harry agreed to stay in the house with the door locked. Ginny and Tonks said that they would be back in about an hour.

Harry started to look around the dining room and the large entertaining room. He decided to follow Dumbledore's advice and sort the items into various piles. He carefully placed the silver service, china plates, lead crystal and the like into one pile that he designated the "sell" pile. Each of the items was marked with the Black family crest, and was quite beautiful in its own right. In total there was service for sixty. He couldn't picture Sirius having enjoyed any of these things, and there was nothing like them in Harry's personal frame of reference. He didn't think that Remus would want the china, and the silver would be deadly to him. It was best to sell it.

Harry rather liked the large room, but the wood had a much darker dark chocolate colored finish than he liked. Actually the entire house was much darker than he liked. He wondered if the Blacks had a dislike of anything light in color? Perhaps Dobby could lighten it up. He also wanted to get electric installed into the house. He recalled a conversation with Professor Flitwick once about that. He decided to write him and inquire about how to get it done.

About that time, Tonks and Ginny came back. Ginny was carrying a small shopping basket with what looked like six paper sandwich lunch bags in it. Ginny took them out of the basket, and Tonks

showed her how to magically resize them. Ginny asked Harry where he wanted the different items put away.

Harry made dinner, while Tonks and Ginny continued working in the dining room. When it was ready, they had spaghetti, salad, French bread, and sodas. After dinner Ginny cleared the dishes, and floated them back to their places, taking about a minute. Harry showed them the great room, and as he did, an idea came to him – a billiards table, several sofas, TV, DVD player, CD player. It would be a great place to have friends over, but again, it needed to be lightened up considerably. After he was done explaining his vision for the room, Tonks took them up to the study on the third level. Harry used the little key to unlock the door. He used his wand to light a fire in the fireplace.

Tonks talked with them about a future schedule. “After we get settled in for a few days, we can exercise in the morning, have breakfast, have lessons, work on defense and have a late lunch. We can continue on home renovations and study up for a few hours after dinner. Harry, do you want to look at any of the other rooms tonight, or have you had enough?”

It had been a long day, starting out with a morning outing with Ginny, then hearing about his relatives deaths, getting a magical practice license, spending more money in one day than he had in his entire life, moving out of Privet Drive and into here. He was tired. “No thanks. I’d just like to get some sleep.”

“OK Harry.” She conjured three squashy sleeping bags and pillows. “We’ll sleep in here tonight, and take on the rest of the world tomorrow. Ginny and I are going to get changed. We’ll be back in a bit.” They left. Harry wasn’t quite sure what to do. Their new clothing wouldn’t arrive until tomorrow. Harry remembered that he had his school trunk still shrunk in his pocket. He expanded it, and found his pajamas. He quickly put them on. A few minutes later, Ginny and Tonks came in each wearing one of Sirius’ shirts, which came down to mid thigh on them. Speechless for a moment, Harry recovered, saying that they looked better on them than Sirius. Each of the women kissed Harry on either cheek, and wished him very pleasant dreams.

Chapter 3

Monday – 8 July

Harry was naturally a light sleeper, and the soft sound of the two women sleeping just feet away from him was quite comforting. He quietly got up, at five and glanced over at Tonks in the early morning light. In her natural state, she appeared to be about five foot four with a slim build. Her hair was cut pageboy length and was a light straw blond in color. Her face was oval shaped. She really was a pretty young woman when she wasn't going for a goofy or hard Goth look.

Ginny had gotten her hair cut since she met him in the park on Saturday morning. Harry realized that he should have said something about it yesterday. It shaped her face nicely, and gave her a more mature look. Slightly taller than Tonks, she was just a bit curvier too. Harry shook himself out of his self-induced trance, smiled to himself, and quietly left the room. He took a shower, and put his same clothes back on. A few minutes later, he made coffee and watched the sun come up as he made breakfast. Forty minutes later Tonks and Ginny came down and sat at either side of the table. There were no elbows in the butter dish this time. The two women at the table exuded self-confidence. Harry had made toast, coffee, sliced fresh fruit, and had cooked some breakfast sausages. He poured everyone a glass of orange juice and sat down.

POP, POP! Dobby and Winky had arrived. They were each carrying a small bag that apparently had all of their possessions. Not bothering to put them down, Dobby ran up to Harry, somehow still wearing at least three hats and cried, "Good morning Harry Potter sir. Dobby and Winky is very happy to see you sir. Can Dobby or Winky get you or your Miss friends anything?"

Harry poured them each a glass of juice and made them each a plate up for breakfast. "Good morning Winky. Good morning Dobby. I am happy to have both of you here. Please sit down and have breakfast with us. After that we can discuss what needs to be discussed. Dobby and Winky, this is Tonks and Ginny Weasley."

Winky curtsied. "Winky is a good house elf. Winky promises to work hard, and keep her master's secrets."

Harry smiled at her. "I know Winky. I am very happy that you are here too. Please join us. Then we can get started."

The prospect of being able to do some proper housework after breakfast seemed to be enough to settle Dobby and Winky down long enough for the others to finish eating. After an amusing few minutes of watching Dobby and Winky anxiously squirm in their seats, Tonks said, "Harry you have business to discuss with Winky and Dobby. Ginny and I will visit in here for a few minutes until you are ready."

Harry took them up to the study on the third level. The little elf began. "Dobby and Winky is both wanting to work for Mr. Harry Potter sir. Professor Dumbledore said that we is free to work for yous as long as yous wants us to. We is both promising to do a good job, work hard and obeys your wishes." Dobby looked at him hopefully.

Harry smiled at his small friends. "OK Dobby. OK Winky. You both can come and work for me. I will pay you each two Galleons a week, and you will need to pick one of the bedrooms to be your own. When I am back at school, you can spend part of your time here, and the rest at school. You both can work for me as long as you wish to. Is that agreeable?"

Dobby and Winky whispered back and forth to each other for a moment. Winky shook her head. "I's only wants one Galleon a week."

Harry had expected this. "OK Winky, then you can save the other ones and give them away to anyone that you wish to. OK?"

Winky and Dobby whispered to each other for another minute. "OK, but we only wants one day off a week, not two days like we had to have at Hogwarts."

Harry smiled. "OK. You can start any day that you wish to."

Dobby hugged Harry. "We is ready now Harry Potter sir. We is both ready."

Harry explained what he was thinking about with the house. "OK. Please start in the big open room on the top level. See if you can clean and lighten all of the woodwork, peel the wall coverings off and paint them white. Thank you both very much. Please let me know what you need. Thanks again. I am really glad that you are both here. We will be sorting the household goods and will need help from time to time. After lunch, please pick out one of the bedrooms for your own. Please ask Ginny what she would like for lunch today. Again, thank you both very much. Also please let me know how to handle the household money that you will be needing."

Winky explained that either Harry could leave some cash out for their use, or they could be added as authorized users of his accounts. Since Harry had a large pile of Galleons available, he told Winky that he would leave the money in a jar on the desk. Harry took a coffee mug, and transfigured it into a matching cookie jar that read Dobby and Winky. Harry dumped about half of his Galleons into the jar and set it back on the desk telling them to take what they needed, and to let him know when he needed to add more. Winky looked very pleased. "We's will certainly do a good job, Master Potter, sir."

"I know that you will Winky. Please call me Harry. Just Harry." Satisfied with their negotiations, the elves scurried off to begin their appointed tasks.

Harry went downstairs and found Tonks and Ginny looking around in the library. Harry remembered to mention that he thought Ginny looked great with her new haircut. Tonks smiled at her, and excused herself to get something out in the kitchen. When she came back, Harry was still visiting with Ginny, who was unconsciously brushing her hair out of her eyes. "OK loverboy, let's get started here. She smiled at them both. "I'll look through the titles and sort out the really dark stuff. You may want to float the paintings off of the walls, and set them in the great room. Ginny if you can, why don't you move the stuff from the front entrance way. Our packages from yesterday should be arriving this afternoon. We can meet up again in about an hour."

Not counting Mrs. Black and Phineas Nigellus, there were about two dozen or so wizards or witches portraits in the rooms that Harry had visited so far. With a swish and flick of his wand, he had floated each into the great room. Sensing their eminent disposal, the portraits began all talking at once. "Who are you? Where are the others? Why am I here?"

About that time, Harry heard a screech. "Blood traitor. What are you doing? Stop. Kreacher!!!" Knowing where the noise came from, Harry quickly walked into the front entrance. Mrs. Black's portrait was yelling nonstop at Ginny. "Filth, get out of my house."

"Silence," Harry shouted imperiously. Somewhat surprisingly to him, she actually did. "This is my house, and at the moment, you are here at my pleasure. I will return in a moment. In the mean time, please hold your tongue." Harry went and found the portrait of Phineas.

"Hello, Mr. Potter," it said. Harry was a bit surprised that the old headmaster had lost all of the arrogance that he had displayed when Harry had talked with him in Dumbledore's office.

"Hello Professor Nigellus. Will you help me?"

Surprising to Harry, the portrait said, "Yes I will."

"There is a portrait of Sirius's mother in the front entrance. She is rude to everyone, and shouts at people as they walk by. The portrait is hanging by means of some type of sticking charm. Either she comes down on her own, or I will blast her off of the wall. It is her choice, but either way, at the end of an hour, the portrait will be off of the wall. Perhaps Professor Dumbledore will take her to Hogwarts, but I won't have her here. Will you talk with her?"

"Yes I will."

"Thank you." Harry carefully picked up the portrait of Phineas and leaned it against the wall on the floor across from Mrs. Black's portrait. He set it at a bit of an angle so he could see Mrs. Black easier and left. Harry entered the library where Tonks and Ginny were whispering with smiles on their faces.

"What did you do?" asked Tonks.

"I told Phineas that he had an hour to convince Mrs. Black's painting to unstick itself from the wall or I would blast the wall out of the house. Perhaps Dumbledore will take her. Maybe Snape would hang her in his bathroom, and could visit her each morning." They all laughed at the idea.

"What did you do with that horrible troll leg umbrella stand?" asked Harry.

Ginny replied, "I got it about halfway to the throw away pile when that witch started yelling at me and you came over. It's still in the hallway. It's disgusting."

"I hate that thing," said Tonks. "I bet I've tripped over that bloody thing twenty times."

"Not anymore," said Harry. "What should we do with all of the paintings?"

Tonks answered, "I would recommend asking Dumbledore about them. Perhaps they can be safely moved. Perhaps they pose too great of a risk to the Order. I hope that you can sell them. They are really quite valuable. I take it that you have no great attachment to any of them?"

"No, with the exception of Phineas. We get along OK." A few minutes later, Harry walked back into the entranceway. Mrs. Black had stopped shouting. Indeed, she wasn't saying anything. Harry asked if he and Ginny could lift her off of the wall and put her in the Great Room. She nodded. Harry and Ginny came back a minute later, each carrying a kitchen chair to stand on. Carefully they lifted the painting off of its mounting, and gently set it on the floor against the wall as they carried the chairs back into the kitchen. Gently they each took an end of the four by six foot painting and started carrying it into the Great Room, Ginny going first. Just then, a gray blur jumped up and grabbed Ginny from behind by the neck, attempting to choke and bite her at the same time. His long grubby fingers were around her neck

and his broken teeth looked lethal. In an instant, Harry had his wand out and hit Kreacher with the same flame cutter spell that Dolohov had attacked Hermione with. Unlike Dolohov, Harry wasn't under a silencing charm, and his spell was full blast. In a blink, Kreacher was on the floor, dead. Harry heard a moaning sound. He rushed over to Ginny. "Are you all right?"

There were tears in her eyes. "That thing jumped up and tried to kill me." She hugged him so hard. "Thanks Harry. You saved me, again."

A moment later, Tonks came out, wand in hand. "Cor, what happened?"

"Kreacher tried to kill me. Harry saved me." They heard another moan. It was the portrait of Mrs. Black. When Kreacher had attacked Ginny, she dropped the portrait just as they were carrying it over the umbrella stand. Mrs. Black had been impaled with six umbrellas.

Tonks pointed her wand at the ruined painting. "Evanesco." The portrait and the Troll leg were gone. "Harry there is no law against saving a pretty girl who is being attacked by a mad house elf." She looked at Kreacher for a moment. "Merlin Harry! What did you hit him with?" Harry looked. Kreacher was in two pieces, each of which had been cauterized by the force of the flame curse.

"Don't know. Something I saw last month."

Tonks was amazed that Harry had killed the house elf so quickly. That was a nasty curse that he had used. She had never seen anything like it. "Ginny, remind me never to piss him off. Evanesco." Kreacher was gone.

It was a quiet group for the rest of the morning. Ginny sat in a leather wing chair in the library shaking. Harry wasn't sure what to do. He went into the kitchen and got three sodas. He brought one over to Tonks who whispered, "Just hold her for a few minutes Harry. She's pretty scared. I'll go see how Dobby and Winky are doing."

Harry walked into the library and sat down on the floor in front of where Ginny was sitting. "Hi Ginny. I brought you a soda." She sat

down on the floor beside him. Harry handed her the soda. She took a sip, and set it down. Ginny threw her arms around him.

“Thanks Harry. That’s three times that you’ve saved me.” Not quite sure what she expected, Harry gently put his arms around her and patted her back. She smelled faintly of vanilla. After another minute, she stood up and helped Harry up. When he was standing, she reached up and kissed him on the lips.

Shocked at first, Harry found that kissing Ginny was much more pleasant than kissing Cho had ever been. She felt so warm and passionate. When she was finished, all Harry could say was “Wow! Thanks.”

She smiled at him, a bit of satisfaction in her heart at having kissed Harry Potter, apparently to his satisfaction. “My pleasure Mr. Potter. Thanks again.” Harry noticed that Ginny had really pretty eyes. They offered so much expression. They heard a faint tapping against the kitchen window. Half a dozen owls were sitting outside the window. Harry opened the window, and the owls flew in. There were letters from Hagrid, McGonagall, Flitwick, Molly and Arthur, Hermione, and Neville. Harry took a look at the letters, while Ginny looked after each of the owls.

Dear Harry,

I was saddened to read of the deaths of your Aunt, Uncle, and Cousin. My parents express their sympathy too. If you need a place to stay, or we can help you in any way, please don’t hesitate to ask.

You are in our thoughts and prayers.

Love,

Hermione

Harry knew that she meant what she had said. She really was his best friend. He picked up the letter from McGonagall.

Dear Mr. Potter

I was saddened to hear of the deaths of your Aunt and Uncle. Albus informed me of the investigation. Please let me know what I can do to help you. I received a letter from Miss Granger. We would be happy to take good care of your Hedwig for the summer. Also attached is the recommended reading list if you have extra time. Again our best wishes are with you.

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

The others were about the same. Molly and Arthur wanted to know if he was planning on attending the funeral being held the next afternoon. Harry hadn't thought about it one way or another. He wasn't sure that he wanted to, and was less certain if he could safely go. The last thing that he wanted was to endanger anyone else. Harry wrote replies to each of the letters, thanking them for thinking about him. He also wrote Professor Flitwick a note asking if he would show him how to do electrical wiring in the next few weeks if he had a chance. Harry asked several of the Hogwarts owls if they would mind staying for a few extra hours in case the others had any post that they needed to send.

It was getting to be lunch time when Remus arrived. He knocked on the door and Dobby answered the door. "Good afternoon, Mr. Lupin sir. You is Mr. Potter's first visitor. I will gets him for you."

"Thank you Dobby," said Remus, more than a little amused at the little elf's quirks.

Harry arrived at the door. Remus gave him a hug. "Harry. It's good to see you. I was sorry to hear of Petunia's and the other deaths. What happened?"

"I'm not certain. Director Bones told me that their car was attacked and blew up somehow. I haven't heard anything else."

Remus considered what to say. The entire Order as well as half of the Aurors were investigating the case. None of the news would do

Harry any good in the short run, so he said nothing about it. Instead he said, "I brought you your things. He went back out to the ancient BMW and brought in two large shopping bags, each containing the shrunken bags that they had purchased, as well as six cases of butterbeer.

"Thank you." Harry felt guilty that Sirius had left his entire estate to him, and had seemingly forgotten his old friend. "We're just about to have lunch. Please join us."

Winky had made fresh vegetable beef soup, fresh baked bread, ham sandwiches, vinegar crisps, and a light desert for lunch. Tonks said, "No offense Harry, but this is way better than jar sauce spaghetti."

Ginny nodded her head, "But yours was great too." She gave him a half wink.

Tonks filled Remus in on their morning, not mentioning the flame cutter curse that Harry had used against Kreacher. Lupin was more than a little impressed to hear how Harry had gotten Mrs. Blacks portrait to volunteer to come off of the wall. "What would you have done if she hadn't agreed to come down?"

"I don't know. I probably would have asked Dobby to scrape her off of the wall. It was kind of ironic that she met her end due to her own house elf attacking someone who was doing something nice for her."

Remus asked if Harry wanted to go to the Dursleys' funeral. Finding out that the time and location had been published in several newspapers, Harry decided against it. For one thing he wasn't in the mood to be verbally abused from Vernon's sister Marge. More importantly, he didn't want to endanger anyone else, and said so.

Tonks shook her head. "Harry it's your right to go if you want to. Every one of the Aurors would be happy to escort you if we need to."

Harry replied, "I know that you'd all put yourselves at risk to protect me. That's exactly why I don't want any of you to get hurt, certainly not over the Dursleys." Changing the subject, he said, "Let's go see how Dobby is doing." When they walked up the stairs into the open

space, they were amazed. Dobby had scrubbed about a fourth of the big room to the point that it looked like it had been constructed just last week. The wood was bright and clear, and the walls were perfectly white. It looked quite impressive. All Harry could say was, "Wow Dobby! It looks fabulous! Thank you so much."

Dobby looked up at Harry with awe in his eyes. The Malfoys had never complimented him, ever. "You is welcome Harry Potter sir. You is a great wizard. Dobby heard how you saved your Miss friend from the bad Kreacher elf. Dobby is very proud of you sir."

Not really knowing what to say, all Harry could think of was, "Thanks." It was awkward talking about killing a house elf to another house elf, even Dobby.

The others had stayed upstairs. Harry went back to the entrance and carefully placed the portrait of Phineas in the library. He asked the portrait if he would mind residing in the study after things got settled in. Phineas was agreeable to that. Harry asked the portrait if he had ever lived in the house.

"Yes, for a few years."

"If you were going to hide something in the house, where would you put it?"

Phineas contemplated the answer for a minute. "I think what you're really asking me is where Sirius would have hidden something. Is that correct?"

Harry smiled. "Correct." He understood why Dumbledore used the portraits in his own office. They made excellent sounding boards.

"Sirius rarely left his room. I would suggest looking under the floorboards under the dresser. Do you know what you are looking for?"

The Gringotts Goblin said that he recently made several substantial cash withdrawals, and I'm not certain that he actually spent the money.

“That would make sense. It would not have been easy for him to get to Gringotts, and he had to have some cash on hand in case he had to leave suddenly.”

Harry realized that this conversation really wasn't Dumbledore's business. “Phineas, can I ask you something?”

“Go ahead.”

“Are you going to tell Professor Dumbledore about the things that you see here?”

“Harry, you are the master of the house. If you say so, I won't say anything unless you specifically request that I do.”

“Thank you. I would like it that way, and I won't ask you about the things that go on in Dumbledore's office.”

“As you wish, young master.”

Meanwhile, Remus had been very helpful sorting through potions and the different equipment in the cellar. At dinner he was able to give a complete report. He recommended that the entire lot be boxed up, and donated to Hogwarts. “Harry there's a cellar full of obscure and dangerous potions and ingredients down there. Sirius' mother was a Potions Master. You and I are not, and I don't expect that you'd be very happy having Snape snooping around for a week. I'd be very happy to box it up over the next few days if that's your choice.”

“Thank you. I'd like that.”

Remus nodded. “Is there anything that you'd like from Hogwarts? I'm flying Buckbeak back to the forest tonight, and will be back tomorrow morning about nine.”

Harry shook his head, “I don't need anything. If you see Professor Dumbledore, you might ask him if it is OK if Mundungus sells the portraits. No worries if you don't see him. I will owl him tomorrow night when we have a more complete list.”

Harry considered his next words for a moment. "Remus, I want to talk with you about something else. I want to share part of the inheritance with you and Tonks, and I don't want you to fight me about it."

Remus looked at his young friend with additional respect. He didn't think that he deserved anything, but didn't want to push Harry away by saying no to him. "What did he leave you?"

"Sirius left me this property, a property in Cork, an interest in the Nimbus Corporation, and an interest in St. Andrews Old Course Hotels Ltd. He also left some cash in the Gringotts account."

"I see. What did you have in mind?"

"I'd like to split the proceeds of the sale of the household items and jewelry between you, Tonks, the Weasleys, myself, Hermione, and a trust fund."

Remus was delighted that his young friend had thought to include Tonks, Hermione, and the Weasleys as well. He asked, "What are your thoughts for the trust fund?"

"I'm not sure. I haven't thought that part through quite yet."

Remus forced himself to go along with Harry's wishes. It was not in his nature to accept financial help from people, but he really could use it. Somehow he would find a way to earn it. He looked at Harry and said, "All right – OK, and thank you. I accept on the condition that you let me help you sort through this stuff this week. There might be more here that you can use than you think."

Harry smiled back. "OK. Thank you and you're welcome. Please don't say anything to Tonks. I'm not sure of the splits yet. OK?"

"Not a word. It will be easier to decide when you know what the total is. I will be back tomorrow morning."

At ten past night, Remus opened the large window from the back of the room where Buckbeak had stayed. Harry remembered back what

seemed a lifetime ago to the day that he had first met and flown on the back of the great animal, and the time that he and Hermione had helped Sirius escape, flying away on Buckbeak. Getting onto the beautiful animal, Remus waved at Harry, Ginny, and Tonks. With a mighty leap Buckbeak leapt out of the window and they flew west to get out of London, and then would fly north. Given that the clouds hid the moon, it was unlikely that they would be seen. Harry closed the window wondering if he would ever see Buckbeak again. He was tired and they still hadn't gotten to the second floor.

Again, Tonks conjured sleeping bags for the three of them. This evening there were no hand-me-downs or ill-fitting sleepwear. Ginny and Tonks came in with silk nighties that looked very good on them. Harry couldn't help but notice how well that the sleepwear fit the women. "You two look quite tidy in your new sleepwear."

"So do you, Mr. Potter," said Tonks, appreciating Harry's genuine comment. She had brought each of them a butterbeer to enjoy while they sat by the fire. When they had about finished, as if on cue, each of the women gave Harry a slightly longer kiss on the cheek. "Pleasant dreams, Mr. Potter," they both said. They winked at him.

"Thank you. You too."

"Good night, loverboy."

Harry drifted off to sleep, but his dreams were anything but pleasant. Wormtail, Umbridge and another Death Eater were being tortured by Voldemort. "Crucio. You idiot. It is a miracle that I am allowing any of you to live." Turning to one of the Death Eaters, he said, "You assured me that he would be with them. Crucio. I expected better things from you." Turning to Wormtail he snarled, "And you assured me that those blundering muggles wouldn't be seen." He got to Umbridge. "And you assured me that their car would be vanished after it had been hit." He walked back to the first Death Eater and kicked him. "No dead Potter. Instead I have a dead drill salesman, and every Auror in the country is looking for you three. Crucio."

Harry woke up screaming. Tonks and Ginny were hugging him. He was soaked in a cold sweat and shaking. They felt pleasantly soft and warm against him.

“Harry, are you all right?” asked Ginny. Tonks had relit the fire. She looked scared for him.

Trying hard to avoid retching in front of the women, Harry said, “I had a vision of Voldemort torturing Pettigrew, Umbridge and someone else in connection with the murder of the Dursleys.” Harry was shaking. He went to the bathroom, and for a minute, another cold sweat hit him. He splashed water on his face, dried himself off, and felt better. When he came back, Tonks had rearranged the sleeping bags, so they were all open. She laid one on top of the other, so it would be softer for them. She motioned for Harry to come between her and Ginny, and covered the three of them with the third sleeping bag. Harry lay on his back as the two women snuggled up to him, put their arms around him, and kissed him goodnight.

Harry woke up at five with both women wrapped around him. Trying to get up without inadvertently groping either woman, Harry took in their smells for a moment. Ginny had the faint smell of vanilla in her hair and Tonks just smelled clean. Harry got up, went down to the library and wrote Professor Dumbledore a note, explaining the vision that he had seen. He was positive that Wormtail and Umbridge were there, but he couldn't make out the third person. He was certain that it hadn't been Snape or Bellatrix. Harry was not certain of the safety of sending the letter that he had just written by school owl. He wished that Fawkes could deliver it. A few seconds later, to Harry's utter amazement, he heard a single note that he recognized as Phoenix song, and the beautiful red and gold bird appeared in a flash in front of him.

Stroking the bird for a moment Harry said, “That was brilliant Fawkes. Can you take this to Dumbledore for me?” Harry looked as the swan sized bird nodded his head. Harry carefully placed the letter in Fawkes' open mouth, and an instant later it vanished in a flash of golden flame.

Ginny and Tonks had been quietly standing in the doorway watching him. Ginny said, "Harry that was amazing! It's still really early. Please come back and get some more sleep. You were up half the night."

They walked back up to the study. "Lay down on your side Harry," said Tonks. Harry did. Ginny curled up behind him, and Tonks in front of him. "Give me your hand Harry." She took her hand and put it around her small waist, above just beneath her ribs. Harry breathed nervously. "Calm down Harry. You aren't doing anything that we don't want you to. You won't do anything extreme that we don't want you to. For one thing, it's not in your nature, for another if you tried anything, we would pound you." Ginny put her arm around Harry and he felt her soft breath against his neck. Harry didn't sleep, but for an hour felt perfectly at peace with the world. As he was gently untangling himself from Tonks, he felt Ginny softly kiss the back of his neck. He took a shower and got dressed, then went down to the library.

Dobby popped in. "Would Harry Potter like anything?"

"Please. Dobby, could you get a copy of the Daily Prophet from yesterday and this morning?"

"Of course Harry Potter sir. Would you like anything else?"

"No. Thank you Dobby."

Dobby disappeared, and returned a minute later.

He looked at his morning's paper

FAMILY OF THE BOY-WHO-LIVED DIE IN MUGGLE ACCIDENT!

(London - Lacy Purehart)

In the early morning hours, the Dursley family (Harry Potter's muggle relations) were killed instantly in an automobile accident on the M4 motorway when their vehicle apparently overturned and exploded. Mr. Potter's Aunt, Uncle and Cousin all died instantly. At this time, no word has released on the whereabouts of the Boy-Who-Lived other than a sighting at Gringotts Bank the same day. It seems Mr. Potter's

life was spared by happenstance. We join the Ministry and the rest of the Wizarding World in our condolences for this latest shock in the life of one of our heroes.

BOY-WHO-LIVED AN ORPHAN?

(London - Rita Skeeter)

With the death of his muggle relatives and guardians as well as the news that his godfather (infamous Azkaban escapee, Sirius Black) has died as well, it seems that Harry Potter has no guardian. There has been no comment so far from either the Ministry or Mr. Potter himself. As Mr. Potter has not reached his 16th birthday, we hope to hear soon if some lucky wizarding family will soon take up the reins of guardianship for this poor lad. Many seem to feel that the family of Arthur Weasley (Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office in the Ministry of Magic) has the most chance of taking in the Boy-Who-Lived as he has been a frequent guest in their home over the summer holidays. Apparently Mr. Weasley's son Ronald is considered by Mr. Potter as his best friend. He was also one of the students who accompanied Mr. Potter to the Ministry on the 28th of June and participated in the Battle of the Department of Mysteries with numerous Death Eaters. We continue to listen for word of Mr. Potter's fate.

FUDGE IS OUT! AMOS DIGGORY NEW MINISTER OF MAGIC!

(London - Reginald Stanton)

In a vote that took no one by surprise after the recent invasion and battle inside the Ministry itself by You-Know-Who's Death Eaters, the Wizengamot voted 39-11 to oust Cornelius Oswald Fudge as Minister of Magic for failure to act on information that He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named had returned in the early summer of 1995, attempted character assassination of Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter through numerous legal and illegal methods including the pressure brought to bear on the previous editors of the Daily Prophet. It is also alleged that personnel in his office attempted outright murder of the Boy-Who-Lived by sending Dementors after him at his summer home in Surrey. Most blatantly, his close association with known Death

Eater, Lucius Malfoy has brought charges of collusion with Death Eaters and their Lord's policies. An official investigation into the Minister's Office and affairs is currently underway according to Director Amelia Bones of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. "That pompous windbag did everything he could to ignore the threat of the Dark Lord and his followers and instead chose to harass the Headmaster of Hogwarts and a 15 year old boy." Director Bones commented as she was leaving Courtroom 10 after the vote. The Wizengamot immediately assigned Amos Diggory, now former Head of the Department for The Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, as Minister of Magic for the rest of Fudge's term of office. We hope that Minister Diggory can turn things around and get the Ministry back on track. Minister Diggory has scheduled a press conference for Tuesday afternoon where he will state the objectives and plans for his time in office.

Harry noticed the article from this morning's paper.

Accident or Foul Play?

(London – Rita Skeeter)

The crash that ended the lives of Harry Potter's relatives is being thoroughly investigated. Muggle Officials reported that several eyewitnesses claim that their car seemed to have flipped over for no apparent reason. Other witnesses claim that the car exploded first then flipped over.

Director Bones was quoted as saying "The evidence is being reviewed, and was being treated as a criminal investigation

Harry thanked Dobby for bringing the papers, and asked that he bring them each day for the holiday.

Tuesday morning after receiving Harry's note, Dumbledore met with Amelia Bones and shared it with her. He explained how Harry could occasionally see amazingly accurate visions of what Voldemort was up to, and that the information could be considered absolutely reliable.

They speculated ho the third person might have been, but neither came to a positive conclusion. The muggle investigators had found evidence that the car had been hit with a rocket propelled grenade. Two known criminals had been found nearby, apparently murdered using the killing curse.

Chapter 4

After putting away a stack of books that they had looked at that morning, Ginny asked, "Harry, could we talk for a while?"

"Sure. Did you have any particular subject in mind?"

"How about growing up on Privet Drive?"

"That's kind of a broad subject. Did you have something specific in mind?"

"Yes. When we were at your house Saturday, I noticed four things: There weren't any pictures of you in the living room. You stared into a cupboard in the kitchen like it had some meaning. You only brought one item from the house that wasn't about school, and you didn't cry."

Had it been another person, Harry would have cut the conversation short and left the room. Ginny was a friend who had asked an insightful question and deserved a complete answer. He walked into the kitchen, picked up four butterbeers and brought them back to the library where Ginny was sitting by the warm fireplace.

"My parents were murdered on Halloween, 1981 at about ten at night. I was one at the time. Hagrid collected me from the ruins of the house. The next night, Dumbledore, McGonagall and Hagrid left me on the steps of the Dursleys. Dumbledore had guessed that the spell that my mother had cast would help protect me as long as I was in the care of my relatives. What he apparently didn't know was that my aunt and my Mum hadn't spoken in years. My aunt blamed witchcraft for everything that was bad in the world and was determined to keep it away from me. They made up lies about my Mum and Dad – eventually they even seemed to believe them. Ginny, I was taken in, but I was never good enough to be considered a real member of their family. I was like their personal badly treated house elf. That cupboard that I took a look in before we left had been my home for the first ten years that I stayed with them. When they went places, they would leave me in the car – either in the back seat or the boot depending on their mood. Occasionally they would leave me with Arabella Figg when they went on holiday, thinking it was a funny joke

to leave me with a mad old bat. It turns out that she is a squib who is in the Order. I just knew her as a mad old lady who had too many cats. You were right. There are no family photos of them that include me. That was a statement that they were making, not a co-incidence. The only times that my aunt took me shopping were to carry the shopping bags.” Ginny felt so bad for her friend. How could anyone mistreat a little boy so badly?

Harry continued. “I found out that I was a wizard when Hagrid gave me my Hogwarts letter. Hogwarts had been sending me letters for about a week prior to that but my uncle kept taking them from me before I could read them. I suppose that they must have sent a few hundred all together. After the first one was addressed the cupboard under the stairs, they must have gotten nervous and put me in the little bedroom that you saw upstairs. It had been an extra toy room for Dudley before that. When I came back from school, their attitudes vacillated between fear of what I might do to them, to ignoring me, to their using intimidation to keep me silent for the holiday. They told anyone who met me that my parents were drunks and that I attended a school for incurably criminals”

Harry finished his butterbeer. “Last summer, Umbridge set a pair of dementors after me. One night, Dudley and I were attacked. I cast a Patronus charm and scared them off. Dudley’s attitude toward me improved a bit after that. A neighbor took the picture that you saw me pick up a few days after the attack. I’m sure that Vernon had left everything to Marge in his Will. There was nothing in that house that meant anything to me.”

Harry concluded. “You’re right Ginny. I didn’t cry. They were my relatives, not my family. Does that make sense?”

There were tears running down Ginny’s face. She leaned over and hugged Harry so hard, nuzzling his ear. “I’m sorry that your childhood sucked so badly. You deserved so much more.

Outside the door, Tonks wiped the tears from her own eyes. She felt guilty for listening in, but remained riveted, listening in on what was obviously an enormously private and painful discussion.

“Ginny, I always dreamed of having family like yours. I would have given anything to have had a Mum, Dad, a beautiful sister, and some brothers.”

Ginny flashed Harry a well-rehearsed, innocent smile. “You’ll just have to hook up with the right young lady and raise a half dozed beautiful little Potters.”

Harry smiled back, “And who might the right young lady be?” Both women silently thought, ‘me.’

Ginny spoke first. “Maybe your favorite red headed, brown eyed witch.”

Harry was delighted, but a bit embarrassed by her words and managed a response no better than, “Oh.”

Realizing his embarrassment, and trying to quickly give Harry an out, Ginny said, “OK, fair is fair. You can ask me anything that you like.”

There was something that Harry had always wanted to know. Bundling everything together so he could get it out in one breath, Harry asked, “What happened in your first year? How did it get started? How has it affected you?”

It was Ginny’s turn to finish her butterbeer. “I found Tom’s diary in one of my schoolbooks a few days before school started. Ironically I made Mum go back to the house to get it when I’d accidentally left it at home on the way to platform 9 & 3/4. Tom slowly seduced me. Eighty percent of what he told me turned out to be lies but there was enough of the truth weaved into his words to be convincing. He made me do disgusting things to myself. I never told anyone before. I was so ashamed; I didn’t know what to do. I’d never been to school before Hogwarts. I didn’t know who to ask for help. I threw his diary away one day. It was like a weight had been lifted off of my shoulders. Then somehow, it came to you. I was sure that Tom would tell you about the sick things that he’d had me do. I stole the book back. Then he made me go down into the Chamber of Secrets. I saw him come out of the diary. That was the last thing that I remember. Then like a real life knight in shining armor, you came and rescued me. You slew

that gigantic basilisk and killed Tom. I owe you my very life Harry.” There were tears in Ginny’s eyes. She wanted Harry to sense her pain and hug her so badly

Harry shifted nervously. “Ginny, I don’t know a thing about that whole wizard’s debt stuff. You don’t owe me anything. I was so relieved that you were alive. I don’t know what I would have done.” He patted her on the shoulder.

“OK. My turn.”

“I know, let me get us another butterbeer.”

Tonks scurried out of the entrance, and went upstairs for a moment. ‘Merlin, she had heard talk of goings on at the school that year. There had been a wild story that some kid had found a forty-foot basilisk. Who was Tom? She had been a first year Auror student at the time, and was sure that she would have heard of a death at the school.’

Harry brought four more bottles back in the library. Deep inside, he knew what conversation was coming next. “Come in Tonks. You don’t have to stand outside.” He handed her one of the bottles. Red faced, she sat down beside them.

Ginny was ready. “Harry what happened in Dumbledore’s office. Please don’t hide anything from me.”

Harry took a steadying breath. He knew that he couldn’t keep this bottled up much longer, and Ginny wouldn’t be judgmental. “I chased Bellatrix into the lobby after she killed Sirius. She laughed at me when I couldn’t curse her effectively. A minute later Voldemort came. Somehow he knew that the prophecy had been smashed. He dueled with Dumbledore for a while then briefly possessed me. He tried to get Dumbledore to kill us both.”

Harry put the butterbeer down. “Finally he left with Bellatrix and got away. A bunch of people had seen him in the lobby. Dumbledore sent me back to his office. I guess that I was in shock over Sirius’ death. Dumbledore picked that time to tell me about a prophecy that had

been made. It'd been made more than sixteen years ago. It's a horrible secret Ginny. Are you sure that you want to hear it?"

Ginny's face turned red, and she slapped Harry, surprisingly hard. "How can you say that? Of course I'm sure." She looked at the red handprint on his cheek and felt embarrassed. "Harry, I'm so sorry. Go on."

"OK. It goes like this:

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, Born as the seventh month dies...And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have powers that the Dark Lord knows not... And either must die at the hands of the other for neither can live while the other survives...The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies."

For a minute, there was silence. Tonks spoke first. "Merlin Harry! That explains everything." Ginny hugged Harry.

Harry gently shook her off. He was obviously upset. "Doesn't anyone have a problem with this? I either have to kill a man or he kills me."

Tonks answered. "That part Harry? Not a bit. You can kick his arse and flame it right off, and its fine with us. We just want to know how we can best help you?"

Harry's voice was rising and cracking with stress. "I don't have the faintest clue how to kill Voldemort. Dumbledore left that part out. Riddle has like fifty years more experience than me. I don't stand a chance."

Ginny stood up, matching his voice in volume. "What are you talking about? You kicked his arse when you were eleven. You killed his image when you were twelve. You beat him in a test of wills when you were fourteen."

Tonks said in a calming, soft voice, "Harry, you are one of two wizards who have ever hit Bellatrix with a spell. Ginny's right. You're

not exactly helpless. Did Dumbledore say anything about the power that Voldemort knows not?”

“No, but I really didn’t give him a chance. I spent most of the time smashing everything in his office.”

Surprised, Tonks asked, “You what?”

“After he told me that he had been keeping the prophecy from me all those years, I flipped over his desk, smashed those stupid silver things, broke a table and shouted at him for keeping secrets from me.”

“What did he do?” asked Ginny, amazed at what he had just said.

“He apologized about a dozen times and said that I was free to break everything in his office. He said that he had too many possessions anyway. Then he sent me a note a few days ago, apologizing for sending me to the Dursleys.”

Tonks shook her head and said, “There’s nothing to apologize over, is there? Harry, part of being a leader is making the best decisions that you can with the information that you have on hand, and learning to live with your decisions. They teach us that in Auror training. You can go crazy second-guessing yourself. Don’t torture yourself or Dumbledore.” Harry nodded.

She continued, “So it seems like you need to acquire a whole bunch of skills training in a short amount of time. After we spend a few more days straightening up this place, we’ll start with skills training. I promise you.”

Ginny smiled. “OK Tonks. You heard my deepest secrets. You’ve heard a few from Harry. It’s your turn.”

“OK – Harry, I am six years older than you. My mother was a witch. My dad is a muggle. He practices financial planning and investing. My childhood was pretty normal. I found my ability when I was in my sixth year at Hogwarts. McGonagall noticed it, thinking that I was trying to become an Animagus. Shortly after, I was contacted by the Auror

Academy. Moody was the representative that was sent.” She shook her head at the memory. “Talk about bad PR. He scared me starkers. Anyway, McGonagall kept tutoring me during sixth and seventh year, helping me make bigger and bigger changes to my appearance.”

She put her butterbeer down. “Word got out about my being a Metamorphmagus, and things got a bit crappy, with the wizards. Ninety-nine percent of them were more interested in having a fantasy date with who knows who, than getting to know me. They all seemed to think that I was only good for some variation of Polyjuice prostitution, so I pretty much gave up dating at the age of seventeen. I like being an Auror, don’t hear me wrong, but it is really nice to just get to be me for a summer.” There were tears welling up in her eyes.

Harry gave her a warm hug. He felt himself a world expert on being the victim of false impressions. “Most people can’t get past mental images of someone and see the real person. Look at Hagrid, Flitwick, Luna, Fleur, or Lupin. You’re right Tonks. Most people would look at them and see an oaf, a midget, a fruitcake, a tart, and a monster. We know better. We see a kind man, a very patient genius, a free spirit, a nice lady, and a really good man. As far as being someone else, I think the two of you look quite tidy just like you are. Harry was rewarded for his compliment by two simultaneous kisses on the cheeks and a pat on the bum. He preferred not knowing who’s hand he had felt. Fortunately an uncomfortable moment was avoided by Winky popping in and telling them that lunch was ready. Harry went into the kitchen, but Ginny held Tonks back.

“Tonks, can we talk for a bit.”

“Sure, what’s on your mind?”

She felt embarrassed even asking the question. “What are we doing with Harry?”

“Ginny what do you mean? We’re helping him fix his house up.”

“We’re going to be with him tonight, rubbing up against him, like two of the biggest teases that I could imagine. The funny part is, we’re doing this in the name of comforting him. If you woke up tomorrow

morning, and his hands were where you would naturally expect a man to put his hands on a woman, are you going to be delighted, or cry foul?"

Tonks considered what the young witch had said, and left unsaid. "I hadn't thought of it that way."

"It just that I'm not ready to..."

Tonks looked at Ginny, remembering that she wasn't yet 15. "I understand Ginny. You don't have to do anything that you don't feel comfortable with."

"Are you going after him, trying to get something started?"

Tonks thought about it for a moment and replied, "I suppose so. He's a nice guy, good looking, kind, brave, and fantastically wealthy. What's not to like? Are you?"

Ginny was disappointed. She didn't have anything like what Tonks could offer Harry. "I suppose so. I would like for him to think of me that way. Is that wrong?"

"No Ginny. That's not wrong. Are you asking me to step back?"

At that moment Harry walked back in. "Who wants a butterbeer? Lunch is ready." He failed to notice the blazing redness in either woman's face.

Tonks said, "Harry we were just hoping that things were moving along at a rate that you are comfortable with."

Harry, assuming that they were talking about the renovation on the third floor replied, "I like it better stripped down, don't you?" Ginny choked on her butterbeer. "I'm sorry. Did I say something wrong? I just think that Dobby did a fantastic job refinishing everything. Don't you?"

"Oh yes. Absolutely," both women replied, making an attempt at a graceful recovery.

At lunch, they reviewed their progress. Dobby had done well on the open area, and would finish that by the end of the day. Remus was still working in the cellar, bringing up things to be sold, or disposed of. Harry asked Tonks to go through Mrs. Black's things, including the jewelry. After Remus was done in the cellar, he offered to clean out Sirius' room that afternoon. Harry gladly accepted the offer.

There was a knock on the door. Dobby invited Minerva and Poppy, both well dressed in muggle attire into the home. Both women commented that Harry's home was looking much better. Harry invited them to stay for lunch. Winky had made Caesar salad, fresh baked breads, turkey sandwiches, tea, and butterbeer. Minerva told them, "We went to the funerals this morning. There were a number of suspicious people there. Suspicious in that they were not properly attired in muggle clothing, instead dressed rather like the wizards at the world cup. They did not recognize us, but it was probably for the best that you choose to stay here." Minerva took a few playing card sized books out of her bag, and expanded them back to their normal size. "Please take a look at these over the next few weeks, Mr. Potter. I need to get back to the castle now. Thank you for an excellent lunch."

Harry walked her to the door. She gave him a quick hug. "Harry, please do not hesitate to ask for something that you might need."

Harry looked her in the eye. "I promise that I will ask, and thank you for the books." Harry thought of something. "Professor, other than Professor Snape, do you know of anyone that could help me learn Occlumency?"

"I will make several inquiries, and owl you this evening."

"Thank you professor." He noticed that she was still leaning heavily on her walking stick.

"You're very welcome. Enjoy your day, Mr. Potter." She opened the door and vanished. Ginny, Tonks and Remus made themselves

scarce. They all guessed that Poppy had private business to discuss with Harry.

Harry invited Poppy upstairs into his study. Fortunately, Tonks had vanished the sleeping bags. In its own right, it was every bit as impressive as Dumbledore's office. The view behind the brownstones overlooked a park. The young mothers congregated there, keeping an eye on their children as they played. Most of them looked to be about Tonk's age.

It had been many years since Poppy was involved in treating a young witch or wizard whose injuries consisted mostly of grief and a profound sense of guilt. Based on the little that Dumbledore had told her, Harry was grieving the loss of his Godfather Sirius Black. Dumbledore had assured her that Sirius was guilty of nothing other than breaking out of Azkaban where he had unjustly been held for twelve years for murders committed by Peter Pettigrew, who was currently at large. He told her that Harry and the other students had left school in an attempt to rescue Black, who Harry had been led to believe was being tortured by Death Eaters. During the rescue, each of the students had been injured, Miss Granger, the worst.

Poppy's training and experience had taught her that the grieving process for a parent, or spouse would typically take six months to a year, based on the person. Unwarranted guilt, she found could either be carried for a lifetime, or shed in an evening. Her late husband had been a submariner in the Second World War. Like many servicemen in wartime, he had come home wondering why it was that one man had lived, and another man standing next to him was fated to die. One certainty that she knew was that men died in battle.

Both sitting in comfortable leather covered armchairs, Poppy broke the silence. "Harry, before we begin, I want to promise you that the things that we talk about will not leave this room. That is Healer-Patient confidentiality, and you have every right to it. As such, I much charge you. She handed him a bill for one Galleon and smiled. "If you are willing, please tell me what happened that day?"

Harry knew that he needed to tell her everything and smiled at her as he handed her the coin. "I was taking my history of magic OWL exam,

and I had a vision of Sirius being tortured in the Department of Mysteries. I previously had visions that had turned out to be true, and I had no reason to believe that this one wasn't real."

Poppy nodded as she took occasional notes. Harry had provided himself with an out and had yet to see it for what it was worth. Minerva had told her about Harry seeing a vision of Arthur being attacked. Electing not to dwell on the point yet, she urged him forward. "Then what happened?"

"I went to find Professor McGonagall, but she was gone." Poppy remembered a distraught Harry desperately looking for his head of house and Order member, but she had been transferred to St. Mungo's for additional treatment after receiving six stunners. So Harry had tried to get help from a friendly professor. Dumbledore had been out of the castle for over a month by then, and Harry probably had no knowledge that she was in the Order as well. That left him virtually friendless.

Harry continued. "I had told Hermione what I had seen. She was immediately suspicious and did everything that she could to convince me to confirm the vision. We snuck into Umbridge's office and used the floo to call Grimmauld Place to see if anyone was here. Mrs. Black's house elf told me that Sirius was gone and wouldn't be back." Poppy nodded encouragingly. Harry really had exhausted the resources that he felt were at his disposal. He had no way of knowing that the evil house elf had been instructed to lie in precisely this set of circumstances.

"Unfortunately, Umbridge caught us. She attempted to use the Cruciatus curse on me, but was talked out of it at the last moment. Hermione talked her into bringing us into the forest, where we got away after she attacked the Centaurs. By then, Neville, Luna, Ron, and Ginny had found us. I tried to get them to go back into the castle, but they insisted on going with. We flew to the Ministry on Thestrals. We got into the department of mysteries and found the spot where I had been led to believe that Sirius was being held."

Poppy asked, "Who had planted the vision in your mind, Harry?"

“Voldemort. I think that my scar serves as a sort of link into his mind. I can occasionally see what he is up to. What I didn’t know was that he discovered the link after the incident with Mr. Weasley, and was trying to use it against me.”

Poppy involuntarily shuddered. Of all of the people to have a mental link with, why did Harry have to be joined to that monster? She didn’t want to get too far off topic. “Then what happened?”

“We got to the row of the prophecy recordings. Ron happened to find one with my name on it.” Poppy nodded. Dumbledore had mentioned none of this at the Order meeting. “I picked it up to take a look at it. A moment later, Lucius Malfoy, Bellatrix Lestrange, and ten other Death Eaters appeared.”

Poppy silently wondered how twelve Death Eaters could have gotten into the building in the first place, how they could move around so easily, and how they could have been notified that Harry had picked up the sphere? She sat in absolute awe that anyone could have escaped twelve Death Eaters. “Then what happened?”

“I made a lame plan to escape and silently tried to communicate it to the others. On cue, we exploded some of the spheres and tipped one of the shelves over onto the Death Eaters and started to run. We beat several of the Death Eaters in the chase that ensued, but I didn’t think to pick up, or snap their wands. I’m certain that the other Death Eaters simply revived the ones who had fallen. We managed to elude them for about fifteen minutes, but were sustaining injuries. We got trapped in one of the rooms and then escaped into the Death Chamber.”

Poppy shuddered again. She had heard of its use in executing witches and wizards before life sentences in Azkaban had come into acceptance.

Harry put down his butterbeer. “At that point, Malfoy tried to get the Prophecy recording from me, but I managed to toss it to Neville. Then Sirius and the others appeared.”

“I know who was there Harry. I’m in the Order too.”

Harry looked at her, somewhat surprised. "Oh. I didn't know."

She smiled at him. "Of course you didn't. Go on."

"To make a long story short, the tides had turned. I captured Malfoy. Neville subdued Mulciber, and the others were in various duels. Professor Dumbledore appeared, and proceeded to capture most of the remaining Death Eaters. Sirius was still dueling Bellatrix. He was taunting her and she hit him with a spell. He fell off of the step that he was on and fell through the arch. I tried to go through to look for him, but Remus stopped me. I got away from him and chased Bellatrix up into the lobby. I cursed her, but she got back up and laughed that I hadn't done it properly. Riddle appeared. He and Dumbledore dueled for five minutes. Voldemort vanished, and possessed me, and tried to get Dumbledore to kill us both. I managed to kick him out of my head. He grabbed Bellatrix and escaped."

Poppy was dumfounded on several levels. Harry had held himself against Voldemort again. Dumbledore hadn't gone into anywhere near this level of detail about the events of the evening. She was about to speak, when Harry started up again.

"Fudge came and talked to Dumbledore for a minute. Dumbledore made a portkey and sent me back to his office. There he told me about the prophecy, how it was made, what it said, and how it affected me. He explained how one of the Death Eaters had heard the first few words of it, and how people have been killed as a result. He explained how he had chosen to keep the knowledge of it from me my entire life, and his rationale for sending me to a home where I wasn't wanted."

He continued. "None of it matters. I led my friends into a situation where they were seriously injured. I led myself into a situation where my Godfather felt compelled to sacrifice himself for me. Then Dumbledore placed the weight of the world on my shoulders – He didn't bother to even give me a clue how to do what I need to do. To add insult to injury, I found that Sirius left me several properties, and all of his stuff. That's some reward for getting him killed."

Harry had about run out of steam. Winky popped in with a tray of butterbeers, tea, and pumpkin juice. Harry took a butterbeer, and Poppy took a glass of pumpkin juice. They both thanked the little elf for her kindness. Poppy thought about the points that Harry had made for a moment.

His experience had led him to believe that the vision was real.

His list of resources had been exhausted.

He attempted to verify the information.

His resourcefulness was at least partially responsible for getting the others out alive.

Dumbledore apparently failed to assist Sirius in the duel against a deranged, killer.

Harry had apparently hit her with some type of spell. He was unusually vague at that part of the story.

Harry had somehow thrown off Voldemort.

The prophecy that all of this revolved around directly involved around Harry. He hadn't been specific regarding the contents.

The rumors regarding his mistreatment at the hands of his relatives were almost certainly true, accounting for his lack of grief over their deaths.

Harry is feeling the weight of the world on his shoulders.

She noticed that Harry had stopped the shaking that he had occasionally exhibited while telling the story. Perhaps telling the story had in itself been therapeutic. "Harry, can I ask you a few clarifications and follow on questions?" There were tears in his eyes, but his voice had been steady.

Harry nodded. "Go ahead."

“Harry, how many of these visions regarding he-who-must-not-be-named have you had?”

“A dozen or so in the last two years, and call him Voldemort or Tom Riddle. That’s his name.”

She shuddered. “Harry if your experience had told you that the visions had been true, and you did what you could within the limits of the resources that you had to verify this one, why do you feel that you failed by having done what you could to save a man who meant so much to you? Specifically what would you have done differently?”

“I would have snapped their wands.”

She nodded at the idea. “Harry, I didn’t hear you say that you would turn you back on someone that you cared about that you believed needed your help. It was your friends’ decision to go and try to help you. It was the members of the Order’s individual decisions to try and lend aid where they could. If you had brought the information that you had last winter about Arthur to some debating committee, he would have been dead before a decision could have been reached, and your friend Ginny wouldn’t have her father.”

She took a sip of her pumpkin juice and continued. “I know this much Harry - We are at war. People die in battle. The wizarding world is in desperate need of leaders. I for one would follow you anywhere. I didn’t come here to tell you not to grieve over your loss of your parents, loved ones, or your relatives. I am suggesting that you leave the blame for their deaths on the shoulders of their killers where it belongs. I came here to let you know that I am on your side, that I truly care about you, and that I will always take the time to listen to what you have to say.”

Harry looked outside at the late afternoon sky. Madam Pomfrey was right - People make their own choices. Hermione knew that he had a saving people thing, but they had done what they could to verify the vision. Tonks had been right - Leaders lead by making decisions with less than complete information. Bellatrix killed Sirius, just as Peter’s betrayal led to the deaths of his own parents. Harry wondered how long Sirius must have blamed himself over that decision.

Harry thanked her for taking the time to talk with him. He spent most of the evening considering what she had told him. Leaders lead, people make their own decisions, and people die in battle. They were at war. The only part that Harry found surprising was that the students and the Order seemed to be the only ones waging it.

Chapter 5

Breakfast on Wednesday was interrupted by a tap on the window. Ginny looked out in amazement. "Harry, there must be five hundred post owls outside."

Harry asked Dobby to let the birds in, collect the mail, and give them each an owl treat. Anticipating that this was just the beginning, Harry asked Winky to go to Eydops Owl Emporium and purchase a dozen bags of owl treats. Harry transfigured a large box and asked Dobby to put the letters into the box, and that Harry would look at them later. Harry had anticipated that they would come, and did not want to get distracted from the task of renovating the home. Tonks offered to sort them for Harry. She spent most of the afternoon doing that while Harry carried down goods to be sold or given away from the second floor.

At the end of the day Harry and Remus looked over the piles of goods that had filled the great-room.

The pile to be sold included the artwork, Mrs. Black's things, some museum quality jewelry, furniture that while obviously valuable and beautiful did not fit Harry's taste, and the formal dinnerware along with the silver and gold serving pieces.

The pile to be given away included the contents of the wine room, a dozen cases of hundred and fifty year old brandy, the potions equipment, the Black family tapestry, a piano, and Sirius' things.

The undecided pile included a cache of muggle weapons, magical weapons, and three dozen loose diamonds.

The pile to be thrown away included most of the old carpets, wall coverings, window treatments, the disgusting house elf heads, and a considerable amount of worn out furniture, including almost everything from the guest bedrooms.

Harry had decided to keep the library, the furniture in the kitchen, the furniture in the study, and a few of the pieces in the library. He also decided to keep the pensive, and Sirius' photo album.

Along the way, they had found 50,000 Pounds Sterling that Sirius had maintained for emergency travel money and 200,000 galleons that had been stored in a shrunken magical trunk under the floorboards exactly as Phineas had suggested. Inside the trunk had been a note to Harry.

Dear Harry,

A part of me wishes that you never find this letter, because it means that I wasn't able to give you the things that you deserve myself in my own time. If you found this, it is my hope that I died helping you, even if only in a small way. It is my hope that if you choose to stay here, you are clearing everything out, and starting fresh. Sell everything that you choose. I didn't buy any of these things, so they hold no value to me.

Please consider using some of the proceeds of the estate sale to help out those that we know who could really be benefited by a bit of money. Please set up accounts, or add to the accounts of each of the Weasleys (except for that worthless prat, Percy), Tonks, your friend Hermione, any others as you see fit, and of course our friend Remus.

Understand, Harry, no matter what happened, I hold no blame whatever on you. I do hope that Dumbledore will forever be cursed with bad dreams and guilt. With sufficient effort, he could have discovered my innocence fifteen years ago. Finding one worthless rat could not have been an effort beyond his skill. Keeping me under house arrest here for the last year was eating me alive. My only happy memory here was the time that you spent over Christmas. For that I truly thank you.

I am certain that the contents of the prophecy are eating at you, most likely because it was hidden from you, and I doubt that anyone has given you a clue regarding how to successfully carry it out. I would ask that you consider having a long talk with Remus this evening. Please hand him his letter and show him this one too if he is not standing at your side as you are reading this. Based on your discussion, I would ask that you read one of the two letters that you will find in the bottom of this trunk, and destroy the other.

Harry, I don't know if people ever really told you, but your mother and father loved you so very much. You meant the world to them. Please find the person who loves you and after you have done the things that you need to do, make your own family. Start a clan of beautiful little Potters. You can find your career later.

Harry, I wish you the very best.

Love,

Sirius

It was too late to start a serious discussion, and Remus wanted time to study the letter that he had been given. Harry sent an owl to Mundungus and asked that he come over the next day to collect the items to be sold.

Remus sat in the empty guestroom reading his letter.

Remus,

First, I'm sorry that I let you down. I had constantly regretted that I had not set up an account for you seventeen years ago when I had the chance. I have asked Harry to consider dividing the proceeds from the sale of the estate into several piles, and that he find one for you. He probably already thought of it himself. He's a great young man.

Remus felt a tear in his eye. Harry had indeed had those ideas on his own. He continued to read the letter from his old friend.

I have significant doubts that Harry will be given the skills and training to meet his destiny by staying at Hogwarts. I would ask that you consider directing his personal studies for the next few years. After you consider this yourself (as I would trust no one other direct such an effort) and have discussed this with Harry, please ask him to read either the enveloped marked school or the one marked studies. Even after giving away half of the cash raised from the sale of those disgusting paintings, the silver, and my mother's jewelry there should

be more than plenty to hire the best tutors in the subjects that he really would need to acquire skills in.

Remus, I simply lack the conviction to believe that Dumbledore will put himself in a position where he could devote the time to give Harry what he needs. If he were of a mind to do it, he would have started a year ago.

If Harry selects the (stay at) school note, I have suggested a list of tutors that he could engage over the summer. I have suggested that he contact Dumbledore after contacting the skilled members of the Order to see what he could be given in terms of evening training. It is a poor choice in my opinion, but it is his right to go to school and be sixteen.

If he elects to go the (home) studies route, I have assembled a list of the finest tutors in a dozen fields, and had listed several alternates in the event of availability conflicts. 150,000 Galleons should cover all of the expenses for two years.

If Harry doesn't see the wisdom of either plan, please talk with Dumbledore and see if he would consider an apprenticeship program for him.

Remus, I am sorry to have to discuss this with you in a letter. Please realize that I value your judgment, and especially in this case. As of the time that I had written this (early June) Dumbledore had not told Harry about the Prophecy. I told him that the risk of Harry's not having the knowledge far outweighed the risk that Voldemort would find out, but he always believes that he knows what needs to be done.

I wish you the best.

Sirius

Remus put the letter down. The idea of providing Harry with a one of a kind education was both exciting and terrifying to him. It was exciting from the perspective that it might provide Harry with the best opportunity to survive and defeat Voldemort. It was terrifying from the perspective of what it would cost Harry personally – not in money, but

giving up his youth, his friends, and running him headlong to meet his destiny. Remus felt that he owed Dumbledore the opportunity to provide his input before he went his own way. He would go see Dumbledore immediately. He would talk with Harry the next afternoon. Then he would spend a few days at his cottage in Nott County over the full moon.

Remus entered the castle just before midnight. Filch scowled at him, but let him pass without saying anything. He gave the password to the gargoyle and gently knocked on the door. The voices inside stopped, and Dumbledore opened the door. "Come in Remus. This is a pleasant surprise. Please sit down. Can I offer you a tea, or a brandy, or perhaps some cocoa?"

"Tea please. Thank you." He watched as one of the elves appeared, with a tray with a tea serving, set it down, and then popped away. "Professor, I have come to talk with you regarding Harry's education."

Dumbledore was a bit surprised at the topic, but did not show it. "That indeed is a subject that has recently been on my mind as well. What are your thoughts?"

"I believe that we are of a like mind in thinking that Harry will not be well served by playing Quidditch, and sitting in history class with Mr. Malfoy." Remus paused a moment to see if Dumbledore would respond. When he didn't Remus continued. "I received a suggestion today that Harry procure the services of several qualified private tutors and pursue a curriculum that may allow him to be better equipped to prevail when he faces Voldemort."

"That is indeed an interesting idea, one I have considered myself. If I may ask, who made the suggestion?"

"Sirius. He left a series of letters for Harry and me to read. Without changing the subject, what do you see as the best course for Harry?"

"Before I answer that, allow me to tell you the alternatives that I have considered. The choice is of course Harry's to make. As much as we may believe we have his best interest at heart, the choice is ultimately his. I originally looked at providing him with additional

defensive training last year, then Fudge disrupted my plans with his insistence of hiring Delores, and the disaster that followed. The practical group that Harry started was the sort of thing that Harry needed. I had of course planned that Harry would be taking rather than leading the lessons.”

Dumbledore had carefully been considering his options. He had considered resigning from the school to teach Harry himself, but realized that he lacked the stamina to do the fitness training personally. He could try it for most of the next month, and see if they worked well together. He could formally appoint Harry as his apprentice. He could hire Harry as an assistant instructor, tutor him in the morning, allow him to work in the afternoon, and back fill his existing coursework evenings. He recalled that Harry had worked well with Remus in the past, and had made significant improvements in his skills.

Dumbledore recognized that Sirius’ idea also had merit. In the short term, Harry needed to have world-class skills in defense, attack, Occlumency, Legilimency, transfiguration, and charms, all well beyond NEWT level. There was something else. Harry needed to have love in his heart. In the end, Dumbledore believed that love would be what would help Harry defeat Riddle. He wasn’t certain how well Harry and Ginny were bonding together. Neither was he certain that Ginny, Arthur or Molly would approve of the idea that he was developing.

Dumbledore decided to remove Tonks as a distraction from that budding romance, at least on a temporary basis. She certainly was a willing guard, but she might be something of a distraction to a teenager, and if the truth be known, probably wasn’t even Harry’s current equal in a street fight. Harry needed a big sister, not another young woman trying to seduce the boy-who-lived over his wealth or fame. He would ask Amelia to have her reassigned to do surveillance on Draco. He would ask Phineas if he had noticed anything between Harry and Ginny. He made up his mind and said, “Remus, thank you for bringing these excellent ideas to my attention. Please allow me to consider them for a few hours. You are more than welcome to stay the evening. I will go and visit with you and Harry no later than ten

AM tomorrow. Please do not mention anything to Harry or Tonks in the mean while.”

Remus nodded, and left to go back to his cottage in Nott. He would collect his training things and plan on spending at least the next month with Harry.

Tonks and Ginny were helping Harry go through the pile of letters, cards and packages that he had received. Harry had received 390 cards and letters from witches and wizards that he knew from school, many of which included notes from their parents offering to help Harry in any way that they could. He received 83 letters from witches offering to do what they could to help Harry ease his pain. Many of those included photos or pieces of string that Tonks recognized as thong knickers. He also received letters from each of the Order members, many of the Aurors, and other Ministry workers offering their sympathy.

Dumbledore arrived at Amelia’s office the next morning at 7:45 and was finishing reading the London Times when she arrived. He explained that Tonks was needed to perform surveillance on Draco Malfoy, and that in the short-term, Harry would instead be watched by Remus. Amelia read between the lines, and asked if Tonks had done anything wrong. Dumbledore assured her that she had done an outstanding job, but others would be a better fit in the near term. She would ask Auror Tonks to come in and provide a report and make the reassignment at that time.

While Dumbledore was conversing with Director Bones, Mundungus had arrived at Grimmauld place. After mentioning to Harry that there were a number of owls outside, he reviewed the instructions from Harry and loaded all of the items to be sold into a Lorry that he had parked out behind the brownstone. The old scoundrel felt honored that Harry had placed his trust in him to handle the estate sale. He had not forgotten failing Harry badly last summer, and vowed that this time he would make it up to him. He told Harry that he would return

with the proceeds by Friday morning. They removed the items to be delivered to Hogwarts, and told Harry that he would pick up the rest when he returned.

When Remus returned, Harry asked him if he could take him to Gringotts on Friday morning and Harrods on Friday afternoon. Remus agreed, and Harry sent an owl to Hermione asking if she and her mother could meet them at Harrods at one to help him with some furniture selections. Without being derogatory, he doubted that Remus, Mrs. Weasley, or Tonks had done much home decorating.

Dumbledore arrived a few minutes later, and as they were discussing the various ideas and options for Harry. Six months ago, Harry would have gone along with any suggestion that Dumbledore had given him, sight unseen. Today things were different. Harry wanted until Sunday morning to decide his path for the next year. All he really wanted to do on Friday and Saturday was get some banking business done and furnish his home.

The two places to train would logically be either the room of requirement or the third floor that Dobby had prepared.

Regardless of Harry's eventual decision he knew that he needed to get started immediately. He committed to having read his sixth year materials in Charms and Transfiguration in the next two weeks. He had been given several apparation books from Minerva. Since he was a legal adult, he could test anytime that he was ready.

Dumbledore kidded Harry that he could always become a women's undergarment merchant, as it appeared that he had collected a sizeable inventory. After Dumbledore left, Remus said that he had to go to Kent and check on something. He would be back the next morning.

Ginny and Tonks spent the day looking through the library. Remus and Harry went through the pile of give away items. Remus had previously asked Harry if he could have the baby grand piano. It would be big for his cottage, but was an exceptional quality instrument, and Remus could have never afforded one anything like it. They had decided to split the two thousand bottle wine cellar ten

ways. They arranged to give a portion to Moody, one for the Hogwarts staff to split, one for Dr. Dan Granger, one for the Aurors, and one for the Order, and to keep half for disposition at a later date. Harry gave two cases of the Brandy to Mundungus for the help that he provided, three cases to split among the members of the order, a case for Dr. Granger, a case for Mr. Weasley, and a case for Remus. He had insisted that Harry keep the remainder for future use.

Remus had reluctantly accepted Sirius' cloaks and wizardwear. Admittedly they were much better than his own, and quite a few of the items had never been worn, as they had been purchased for him by the Order members while the Order had been using his house for meetings.

Harry had given Mundungus most of the loose diamonds and asked that he have them set as diamond stud ear rings to give as gifts.

Unexpectedly an owl from Mundungus arrived about nine that evening. Harry took it and went to his study.

Dear Mr. Potter,

The sale of the items that you gave me concluded in considerably less time than I had anticipated. The results are as follows:

Mrs. Black's belongings and the jewelry that you asked me to sell were well received on the market. The total proceed was about 800,000 Galleons for the lot. The artwork was also easy to sell. The total from the sale was just over 350,000 Galleons. The china and silver service sold for 82,000 Galleons. The pieces of furniture netted 22,000 galleons. The total of 1,254,000 Galleons, net of my 1 seller fee was deposited into your account at Gringotts.

At your service,

Mundungus Fletcher

Harry decided that the Black estate fortune should be split as follows;

Remus – 200,000 Galleons

Tonks – 100,000

Hermione – 100,000

Ron – 100,000

Molly, Arthur – 50,000 each

Fred, George, Bill and Charlie – 20,000 each

Ginny – 100,000

Sirius Black victims fund – 350,000

DA group – 20,000

Harry – 104,000

Harry had considered the distribution carefully. Remus would have enough money to last him the rest of his life. The others would have enough money to make a material difference in their lives. They could use it to purchase a home, or get just about anything that they wished. In the case of Fred, George, Charlie and Bill, it would offer them a good start on a home. Harry had decided to start a war victims fund, hoping that somehow the war would end before the money was exhausted. He didn't want anyone to not be able to go to school or not have proper clothing to wear. Harry believed that the distribution was consistent with Sirius' wishes.

That evening Tonks was taking a shower in the bathroom that they had been using. She went to borrow Harry's razor and noticed that he did not have one. She borrowed Ginny's instead. Harry certainly had his share of facial hair, but for some reason it didn't seem to grow. Turning off the shower, she dried herself off. Deciding on what she wanted to test, she got dressed in white silk pajamas and went to find Harry. He was in the library studying with Ginny. "Harry, I need to borrow you for an hour. She looked at Ginny and whispered, "I'll give him back. I promise."

Tonks took him up to the study with three butterbeers in hand and she conjured two soft cushions for them to sit on the floor, and directed Harry to sit. "Harry, when was the last time that you had a haircut?"

"Beginning of fifth year, I guess. I think Ginny cut it."

Tonks nodded. She was certain that she was right about this. "When did you start shaving your face?"

"Beginning of fourth year, I guess. Why?"

"Just wondering. Harry, when was the last time that you shaved your face?"

"Beginning of fifth year, I guess. Why?"

Her crystal blue eyes met his emerald ones. "Harry, I think your hair is something that you can control. I want you to think about having longer hair, OK? Really try and concentrate on what it would feel like to have longer hair. If you do, I have a treat for you." She picked up a book, and started reading it. After a page, she glanced over to really look at Harry. Nothing had happened. "Keep trying Harry. Think about having hair that would reach your shoulders." She undid one of the buttons on her nightshirt, and went back to reading, noticing him glance at her. After a few more pages, she looked at Harry. His hair had grown two inches! She undid the rest of the buttons on her nightshirt. "Shoulder length, Harry, shoulder length. After another page, she saw Harry with shoulder length hair. She took her nightshirt off, revealing a white lacy bra. Harry seemed very interested in it. "Why don't you see if you can change your hair back to its original length," she said. Tying with the drawstring on her pajama bottoms, she said, "Feel yourself with regular length hair." Within a minute, Harry's hair was its usual length. "Very good Harry." The pajama bottoms fell to the floor, and she stepped out of them. "If you'd like to see the rest, grow your hair again, and then shrink it back after I have asked you." Within a minute, Harry had long hair again. Tonks undid her bra, and stood a few feet away from him, facing him. Harry's eyes were fixed on hers. He seemed to be trembling. "OK, now change it back to normal." Nothing happened.

Harry was obviously embarrassed. "Tonks, that is a fantastic offer, but I just don't feel right about it. I'm sorry." His eyes had never left hers.

She understood. She had taken the tease way too far. Harry had more moral rudder than any man that she had ever met. He needed a big sister, not another girlfriend. "OK, you set your hair back to normal, while I get dressed again. We'll continue this downstairs. OK?"

By the time she had picked up her things from the floor, Harry looked like he always had.

Tonks put her hands on his shoulders and softly said, "Harry, I didn't do that to embarrass you, just give you a bit of extra encouragement that McGonagall probably wouldn't have." She gave him a little kiss in the nose. "Let's go find Ginny. You did really great." Harry nodded, thinking a really terrible thought about his Transfiguration professor. Everything was OK between them again. They walked into the library. Tonks said, "Ginny, don't you think that Harry would look fantastic with longer hair?"

Harry was looking at Ginny, who was looking at Tonks, who was mouthing YES.

Ginny replied, "I think you always look fantastic, but I would be very interested to see what you would look like with longer hair. Can you show me?" Harry thought about having shoulder length hair. He felt warm for a few seconds, and then saw the amazed smile on Ginny's face. "Harry, that's fantastic. You look gorgeous!!!"

Tonks said, "Harry, that's really fantastic progress. I was a few months before I could grow my hair that fast."

Harry turned around to look at Tonks. "It must have been the encouragement," winked Harry. He turned around to look at Ginny, whose face had turned flame red.

It was getting late. Tonks said that she was going to sleep. Harry stayed up to do some reading. He found a book that had a section on

Metamorphmagus. It was an exceptionally rare ability, only somewhat more common than speaking Parseltongue. After an hour he went up the stairs. There were the usual three sleeping bags. Ginny was in hers, and Tonks was in hers. It was a warm evening. Harry lay down on top of his listening to the soft breathing of the women and fell asleep immediately. For once, he had very pleasant dreams.

Chapter 6

Friday - 12 July

Tonks would receive her owl from Director Bones about the time that Harry and Remus were leaving for Gringotts. She would be gone by noon. Ginny had been invited to go along. She elected to stay and study.

Dumbledore had previously made Harry several two-way portkeys. One would take him to Hogsmede station and back to his car park, one to Gringotts, one to Hermione's home, and one to the Weasley Burrow. Each of them was keyword activated.

Harry and Remus took the portkey to Gringotts. Harry went to the counter and asked for Griphook. The goblin came over and showed Harry into one of the meeting rooms. Remus insisted on waiting in the lobby. Harry explained what he wanted to do. Harry expanded the trunk and redeposited the Galleons that Remus had found. Griphook took careful notes for a minute while Harry read off the names and amounts. Harry handed Griphook the notes that he wanted delivered to each of those that had deposits transferred into their accounts. "Please excuse me Mr. Potter. I will return in a few minutes."

Harry recalled writing each of the notes.
Dear

Sirius Black asked that I distribute a portion of his estate to those that we considered friends and family. A deposit of was made into your account reflecting our wishes. The money is yours. Please consider using a portion of it to help someone who could use a hand.

Harry Potter

Griphook came back with four boxes containing keys, each with a name. "These witches and wizards did not have accounts. I set them up as regular accounts. Here is the box for Hermione Granger, for Ronald Weasley, for Ginevra Weasley. He handed Harry another box. "Here is the key for the victims trust account. I trust that it is your wish

to deliver the boxes yourself?" Harry nodded, not sure of what he would say. "As such there is no letter being sent to them."

Griphook continued. "Mr. Potter, you asked me to look into your parent's estate. There is indeed an estate. There is also a trust fund, but I do not yet have sufficient details on that."

"Griphook, could you manage all of my accounts for me?"

"Certainly Mr. Potter if that is your wish, I would be honored to serve you."

"It is. Who should I talk with, or what would you like me to sign?"

"Excuse me for a moment, Mr. Potter."

Ragnot came in a moment later with Griphook. "Is it your wish that Griphook handle all of your accounts, Mr. Potter?"

"Yes, please."

"Very well Mr. Potter." He left the room to tell one of the other goblins that they were back to driving the little carts.

Griphook asked Harry to wait one more minute. He returned and handed Harry several documents. "Here is a credit card, here is a book of bank drafts, and here is a coin case. You hold the case in your hand, identify the amount and currency that you wish, and it will be found inside the case when you open it. That way, you do not need to carry a trunk full of galleons or other currency when you make large purchases. The credit card is issued from Barclays and can be used anywhere in the nonmagical world. The bank drafts can be used for larger purchases in the wizarding world. The driver license and insurance card will serve as appropriate identification should you require it. Please come back in a few years, and we will correct your birthdate. I will owl you in a few days when I have the specifics regarding your other accounts. Is that acceptable, Mr. Potter?"

“It is perfect. Thank you for your help Griphook.” Harry turned to leave, and asked, “Griphook, would it be OK if I used this room for a few minutes to talk with someone?”

“Of course, Mr. Potter. I’ll get him for you.”

Remus walked in, with a good idea of what the conversation would be. Harry started. “Remus were my parents wealthy?”

This was the discussion that Remus had been expecting. He was saddened that it wasn’t Dumbledore who’d had it with Harry five years ago.

“Wealth is relative Harry. Arthur Weasley would have always told anyone who asked that he was a wealthy man, having so much family. Now he has some money to go with it. Today you most likely made me a very wealthy man, in that I had never made more than two thousand Galleons a year in my life. Relative to the Blacks, your parents were wealthy. Relative to your parents’ funds, the Potter Trust is large.” Remus tried to convey his point, “Harry, at some point, the specifics don’t really matter. If you own interests in two businesses or fifty, you still only need one pair of shoes at a time. Yes you are a very wealthy man Harry, but like Dumbledore says, being a pampered prince is not your nature Harry. Helping people is your nature. Do not be ashamed by your wealth Harry, but do not be awed by it either. Does that make sense?”

Harry nodded. Why hadn’t Dumbledore told him? He could have at least made sure that Harry had decent clothing or shoes to wear.

Remus continued. “What does matter is that you have a Will with some designated beneficiaries, and an institutional beneficiary. I take it that you are hearing most of this for the first time today?”

Harry nodded. Remus felt angry with Dumbledore. He had let Harry down in so many ways. He vowed not to let it happen to his young friend again.

They took the portkey back home. A minute later they took the portkey to the Burrow. Molly was surprised to see them, but gave

Harry a huge hug. "Harry it is lovely to see you. Is everything all right? How is Ginny? How is your house project coming?"

"I am fine, Mrs. Weasley. Ginny is fine, and the house is coming along great. Is Ron around?"

"Yes. He's in the paddock flying with Luna."

"I'll wait here Harry," said Remus.

Molly said, "Wait Harry, before you go, Rita Skeeter was around yesterday asking if I knew where you were. I told her that I hadn't seen you since you were informed about their deaths."

"Thank you Mrs. Weasley. We will be very careful. I need to see Ron for a minute."

"We love you, dear."

"Thanks Mrs. Weasley," said Harry as he walked out into the back garden.

Harry walked over to the paddock and saw his two friends having fun on their broomsticks. Luna was throwing balls, and Ron was (generally) catching them. Ron saw Harry and they flew over. "Hi Harry. I thought that you were locked up for the summer?"

"I am Ron. Thanks for reminding me. I'm taking care of some of the details from Sirius' estate. He left you this." Harry handed Ron the Gringotts case, and the letter that Harry had written.

Ron opened the case first. "Wow, Harry. Is this my own Gringotts account key?"

"Yes Ron. Sirius wanted you to have it. Use it well. I need to go now. I'll see you later. Bye Luna."

"Bye Harry. Luna waved at him and smiled."

There was a scream from inside. Molly had received her letter. Remus called, "Harry, we'd better get going. Ron, you'd better look after your Mum for a bit. She's just received quite a shock."

They left the burrow and went back to Grimmauld place. A few minutes later, Professor Flitwick knocked on their door. Dobby let the old wizard in. He was carrying a trunk and expanded it as he came in. "Hello Mr. Potter. It's good to see you. I am happy to help you wire your home. Typically outlets are placed about every six feet and at a specific height. I would like you please to mark where you would like the outlets and the switches placed. I will work on the circuit box bringing the power in from the outside electric line. When you have finished, please collect me and I will show you how to run the wires through the walls."

Harry and Ginny walked from room to room marking locations and cutting the cabling into the proper lengths as Flitwick had demonstrated.. Ginny said, "Dad would go crazy if he was able to see this."

Harry thought about Mr. Weasley's obsession with plugs and smiled at his friend. "Do you really like my hair this way?" He had it pulled back tied with a black leather lace.

She gave him a quick kiss in the cheek. "I love the way that you look."

For a moment, electrical outlets were the last things on Harry's mind. "Thanks Gin. I really like the way that you look too." Their eyes met and they stared at each other for a few seconds, smiling. They had finished marking all of the spots. They found professor Flitwick who had just finished putting in the circuit box. He showed them how to magically run the wires through the walls, and divided the house appropriately so any one area wouldn't be overloaded. Next he connected the switches and outlets. Finally he had Harry look at various ceiling lights that he had brought. The expandable trunk that he brought had a wide selection. He picked out lights for the bedrooms, kitchen, bathrooms, entranceway, the library, the study, the great room, the cellar, and the hallways. He recommended that Harry leave the third floor open area with the gas lamps, as they were

less affected by strong magic in the event that Harry were to use this room for training.

Flitwick was very impressed with the work that Dobby, Winky, and the others had accomplished in a very short period of time. They walked from room to room, with Flitwick finishing the wiring, and mounting the outlets and ceiling lights. Harry was extremely grateful to the Professor for helping him and told him so. "Actually Harry, it is my pleasure. I always have enjoyed wiring, but rarely have the opportunity to practice. Most older wizards and witches fail to see the need, and most younger witches and wizards can't afford it." Harry asked the professor how much he owed him. "The wiring, switches, outlets, circuit box, outside connection and fixtures come to 3,300 Galleons, but you can pay me anytime that it is convenient. Harry asked him, if he preferred cash or a Gringotts draft. "Whatever's easier for you Harry. I had more fun today than I expect to all summer." Harry went to the study and wrote Flitwick a draft for 3,500 Galleons, placed it in an envelope, and brought one of the bottles of Napoleon brandy with him.

"Thank you very much Professor. I expect that I will like my home much more now. Please accept this as well."

"You may indeed, Mr. Potter. Thank you very much. Your home will be lighter and brighter. However, I expect that you will find that it isn't the things that bring happiness to a home, rather the people. He smiled at both of them. Enjoy your holidays." He packed up his trunk, shrunk it, placed it back in his pocket, opened the back door and vanished.

That evening Remus went back to his cottage. Winky made Harry and Ginny dinner, and announced that she and Dobby would be back tomorrow in time to make dinner, leaving them alone to fend for themselves for the evening. As he was locking the doors, Harry received an owl from Mundungus.

Dear Mr. Potter.

Thank you so very much for the gift of the two cases of Napoleon Brandy. It will warm my heart for many an evening. I made the

deliveries that you requested. Moody's eyeball fell out when he realized that he had received!!! Without losing body parts, everyone else was very appreciative as well.

In the small package, please find ten identical boxes. I had the loose diamonds made into diamond stud earrings. They were matched by size. The diamonds ranged from 1.95 to 2.25 carots. Please consider saving the sixteen others that you have. Any of them would make a fine engagement ring, should the occasion arise. They range from 2.25 to 2.5 carots.

It was a pleasure serving you Mr. Potter. Please contact me again if I can be of any assistance.

Mundungus Fletcher

After dinner Harry asked Ginny where Tonks had gone. Ginny looked a bit surprised that he was asking. "She said that Director Bones unexpectedly reassigned her to do some surveillance work. She packed up her things while you were gone, and left crying. Did you send her away?"

Harry looked surprised. He wondered if she was mad at him over the other night. "No. This is the first that I heard of it. "Gin, what are you doing tomorrow? Remus and I are going to Harrods to pick out some furniture, and I'd like you to come along. I asked Hermione and her mother to meet us there. She probably knows what goes with what a lot more than I do."

Ginny was anxious for a moment. First Tonks went after Harry, now he made arrangements to see Hermione. Then she thought about it for a moment. She had never set foot in a furniture store in her life. Tonk's taste was typically Goth or bizarre. Her mother couldn't really help, and Harry was looking in a muggle store. He'd made the logical choice, and he hadn't made a big deal about it. She smiled and replied, "I'd love to go. What time?"

"Remus will take us. He said that we'd have to leave at 11:30 to get there by 1:00."

Harry was obviously nervous about something. Ginny got up to get them a few butterbeers. She handed him one. His hand touched hers for a moment as he accepted the bottle. She could feel his magic. "Thanks. Ginny, I have something for you from Sirius." This was not what she had expected. Why would Harry be nervous over giving her a second hand watch or something?

Harry reached into his pocket and handed her a small flat case and a letter. "Here," he said. "There is a letter to go with it. I'll be right back. Go ahead and open it." He walked into the kitchen to get them each a biscuit. Walking back, he heard an excited shriek.

"Harry. Is this for real? A hundred thousand Galleons! That's a lot of money. Can I share this with my family? Thank you sooo much!!!"

Harry smiled at the kind heart of his friend and thought, 'She really is a fantastic young lady. Always thinking of others.' Harry came in and handed her a biscuit. "There's no need to. Everybody got some. Your Mum just about fainted when she got her letter. Sirius asked that your parents, and your brothers except Percy all get something. I went to Gringotts to make the transfers and open the accounts earlier today. We dropped Ron's key off this morning."

Ginny's heart was racing. "Harry, how rich was Sirius?"

"I'm not exactly sure. The stuff that we sold this morning netted a bit more than a million Galleons."

"Cor Blimey, and he lived off rats for a year?"

Harry nodded. "His life really stunk. He didn't get along with his Mum while he was growing up, got sent to prison when he was twenty one, spent twelve years in Hell for a crime that he had nothing to do with, and spent the last years in hiding."

Ginny could see that Harry was talking himself into a funk. To get him to refocus, she asked him to practice growing and shrinking his hair. Harry tried a half dozen times and each time it got a bit easier. Finally it was time to go to sleep. They cuddled up on the couch together. Harry had transfigured a handkerchief into a light blanket and put it

around them. “Goodnight Ginny,” whispered Harry. He gently kissed the back of her neck, sending tingles of delight down to her toes.

“Night, Harry,” she said, melting herself into him. Harry dreamed that Voldemort was talking with Wormtail about checking out a house immediately prior to a raid. Harry woke up at four, realizing that he was cupping something that he didn’t have permission to be holding. He gently got up, covered Ginny with the blanket and went into the kitchen to finalize his shopping list.

Saturday Remus arrived at eleven, and went over the list with Harry. He would look for some workout equipment while Harry and the Grangers looked at furniture. Ginny would look for sheets, pillows, and bedspreads. Remus took the ancient BMW out of the car park and they drove to the car park by Harrods. They met Hermione and her mother, Dr. Emma Granger inside the store. Harry explained that he was looking for furniture for an entertainment room, six guest bedrooms and a master bedroom. He needed window treatments for two dozen windows, and had measurements for each of the rooms and windows. He also wanted a large television, a DVD player, and a CD player. He hoped to put them in an entertainment center.

Hermione’s Mum had obviously thought this through. She started by explaining in very general terms the different styles of furniture that Harry might consider. Harry decided that he liked a light oak finish, and comfortable, more informal furniture. He explained that the first floor of brownstone had a library, kitchen, a large formal room that he wanted to make into an entertainment room, an entranceway, and several loos. On the second floor, there were a total of eight bedrooms and two loos. On the third floor was a study and a large open area and two loos. Emma was surprised at the size of it. “That’s a lot of home to furnish Harry. How much of it were you planning on furnishing to start with?”

Harry replied, “The study, the library and one of the bedrooms are OK. I need stuff for the bathrooms, the bedrooms, the entertainment room, and the windows. We got rid of all of the old furnishings – the paintings, the old carpets and wall coverings.”

“What are the walls and floors made of?”

“The walls are either plaster and lathe or brick, and the floors are one inch oak planking or slate. They have cleaned up pretty good so far, and are being refinished in a lighter finish. The wall-coverings have all been peeled off and the walls have been primed, and repainted white.”

Emma nodded, impressed at Harry’s eye for detail. “Harry, if you don’t mind my asking, what is your budget for this project?”

“I had budgeted fifty thousand, Ma’am. I don’t know if that is enough to get a start with?”

“Fifty thousand Sterling is a lot of money Harry.”

“Galleons. That about 220,000 Sterling at the exchange rate that they give me.”

“Emma looked exasperated at her daughter’s friend. ”Harry, we are not going to spend that much money today or in total. Let’s start with the things for your entertainment room. She flagged down a saleswoman and explained that they needed her for the afternoon. Emma asked Harry what he was thinking of for the entertainment room.

“I’d like three comfortable leather sofas, either brown, green, or rust, two squashy armchairs, an entertainment center, a television, a DVD player and a CD player.”

Hermione smiled at Harry, but had discovered an apparent problem with his thinking. “Harry, there’s no electricity in the house.”

Harry grinned. “Professor Flitwick and I put it in yesterday. We have over two hundred outlets, ceiling lights, switches, a circuit breaker box and even a meter!”

Hermione winked at Harry. “Very impressive Mr. Potter.” They selected three sofas, two were rust, and one a Kelly green color, a nice television, and the other things. For the windows, they selected honeycomb pull up blinds. Emma mentioned that Harry could always

add swags or valances later. For each of the guest bedrooms, they selected a queen size bed with a chest of drawers, night stand, a chair, and a lamp for the nightstand. Ginny had picked out different bedspreads, pillows and sheets for each room. For Harry's room, they selected a king size sleigh bed, dresser, chest of drawers, two nightstands, a mirror, a chair, and a lamp. They bought two large area rugs for the entertainment room, and an area rug that nearly fit edge to edge for Harry's room. Finally they found towels and curtains for the different bathrooms

The bill came to 46,220 Pounds! The sales woman asked Dr. Granger how she wanted to pay the bill. Harry smiled at her, trying to avoid an embarrassing moment. "I'm your customer ma'am. I will be paying cash." Harry pulled five bundles of crisp 100-Pound notes from his jacket pocket, each bundle containing a hundred notes. He counted thirty-seven bills and stuffed them back into his pocket. He handed the saleswoman the money, along with the address that he had used the first time.

Emma invited them all over for dinner. She was slightly confused. Hermione had talked about Harry a number of times in the past. She had frequently mentioned his bravery, and his misfortunes regarding his parents, his Godfather, and most recently his aunt and uncle. She had never mentioned him being obviously wealthy. She had never seen anyone pull fifty thousand Pounds Sterling out of his pocket to pay for something.

When they got to the Granger home, Dan Granger took Harry aside and thanked Harry profusely for the gift of a hundred absolutely fabulous bottles of wine. "You're very welcome sir. I hope that you and Mrs. Granger enjoy them." Harry hesitated. "Sir, I need to tell you something. Sirius left some money to Hermione. I took the liberty of opening a Gringotts account for her. Sir, with your permission, I'd like to give Hermione her vault key."

Dan was somewhat amused. The wizarding world had such formal words – vault key. "Certainly Harry. If you don't mind my asking, how much money are you referring to?"

"One hundred thousand Galleons sir."

Dan corrected his thinking - vault key just about covered it. At the exchange rate that he was paying, that must equate to well over half a million in Sterling!!! He replied, "That's a substantial sum Harry. Is there something that she needs to do or sign?"

"Not really sir. I took care of the details at Gringotts. If she has any questions, she can see my banker, Griphook. I'm going to take her for a short walk before dinner sir. We'll be back in twenty minutes." Dan just nodded, not knowing what to tell this young man regarding his daughter's good fortune.

As Harry and Hermione stepped out the back door, Harry wasn't certain what to say. He may have had his guilt absolved regarding Sirius, but his profound sense of guilt for getting Hermione injured so badly hadn't diminished in the least. Hermione didn't seem to feel that way, and did not feel the need to have Harry fall on his sword on her behalf. She took his hand as they walked down the sidewalk. After a minute, she stopped and put her hands on his shoulders. Looking into his emerald eyes she said, "Harry, I need to tell you that all of my injuries have healed. I do not blame you for anything that happened, and I have missed seeing you. I was really sorry to hear about your relatives Harry." There was a tear welling in her eyes.

"Thanks Hermione. I miss seeing you too. I have something for you." He handed her the elegant jewelry box, and she opened it. "Sirius left you some money, and I opened a Gringotts account for you."

She put it in her jeans pocket, and gave Harry a warm kiss and a hug. "Thanks Harry. I really miss him too. Are you OK?"

"I've been keeping busy, and people have been keeping an eye on me." Just then, something caught Harry's eye and he remembered his dream from the night before. Harry grabbed Hermione harder than she would have expected, kissed her, and whispered in her ear, "Do you have your wand?" Hermione squeezed his bum. "I think I saw Pettigrew."

Chapter 7

Still holding Hermione closer than he ever had, Harry whispered, "I'm going to try and stun Wormtail. I want you to run to your parent's house and collect everyone. We're going to portkey to Grimmauld Place. On three." He kissed her once, again, and a third time. Harry pulled his wand out of the wrist holder that Remus had found for him and fired a stunner, squarely hitting the rat. Pettigrew flew back ten feet from the sheer force of the spell. Hermione ran as fast as she could, shouting, "Get over here quick! Mum, Dad, Remus, Ginny. Now!!!" Hermione shut the oven off, as Harry burst into the house.

"We're going to portkey out of here. Everyone hold onto this drumstick. Now!!!" When everyone was touching it, Harry activated the portkey, and in an instant they were in the car park behind the brownstone. "Get in the house, quick."

Remus and Ginny ran a few steps and vanished. "Harry, they can't. Help them," pleaded Hermione.

"What?"

"My parents."

"Oh." Harry pulled the slip of paper that Dumbledore had given him out of his wallet and showed it to the Grangers. "Read this, quick."

They did, and the door magically appeared. Ginny cried, "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry slammed the door shut, and said, "Remus, I got him! Get Bones over here quick."

"Who?" asked Remus, trying to calm everyone down with his mild manor.

"Wormtail. I stunned him in Hermione's back yard." Harry held up the stunned rat and set it in the floor.

Now it was Remus who was over excited. "I'll be back in five minutes. Everyone, keep your wands out, and keep back! Harry, don't hesitate to use anything to keep him from getting away." Remus stepped out the door and vanished.

"Harry, what's going on?" pleaded Mrs. Granger.

"Just five minutes, Mrs. Granger, then I'll tell you everything that you want to know. I promise." Harry kept his eyes focused on the motionless rat with the silver paw. "Dobby?" The little house elf appeared. His eyes never leaving the rat, Harry said, "Remus and some others will be here in a minute. Please let them in when they come. Hermione, please keep your parents away from him." The Doctors truly looked frightened.

A minute later, Amelia, Kingsley, Hestia and Remus burst in. Hestia had a set of anti-apparation manacles and a portkey in her hand. Remus knew the spell to force an Animagus back into human form. He cast it, and immediately Hestia placed the manacles on Peter Pettigrew. Kingsley and Hestia immediately portkeyed the still stunned form of Pettigrew to the holding cell at the Ministry.

Remus took the very shaken Doctors and Ginny into the kitchen. Dobby opened one of the bottles of the Napoleon Brandy and poured three very large glasses for the Grangers and Remus and a butterbeer for Ginny.

Amelia took Hermione and Harry into the library and began asking questions. "Hermione, can you tell me what you saw?"

Hermione was remarkably collected. "Harry and I had gone into the back garden at my parents' home to talk before dinner. After a few minutes, Harry saw the rat. He whispered into my ear to get ready to run into the house, collect everyone and be ready to leave. I ran, and about fifteen seconds later, Harry ran in holding the rat and a portkey. Everyone grabbed it, and we ended up in the back garden here. Harry showed my parents the information about the house and we all ran in. Harry asked Remus to go find you and left. You arrived a few minutes later."

"Thank you Hermione. Harry did you see anyone else?"

"No ma'am. My concern was that there were other Death Eaters getting ready to attack the house."

"Did anyone know that you had been invited to the Grangers for dinner?"

"No. We had gone shopping together in London, and were invited over at the last minute. When I saw Pettigrew, I remembered that I had a vision last night of Voldemort telling Peter to watch the house in advance of an attack."

Amelia was shaken at the words that Harry had just said. Clearly it was the Grangers who had been the target. It was good fortune and remarkably quick thinking on Harry's part that averted a tragedy. She presumed that the capture of Pettigrew would have caused the attack to be called off, but she would send a dozen Aurors into the home for the evening, and see what happens. She said, "Well done Harry. I think it best that the Grangers do not return home this evening. Harry, could you possibly put the Grangers up for the evening?"

"Certainly, Director. Could you please conjure sleeping bags for everyone? I ordered bedroom furniture today, but it won't come until tomorrow."

She smiled at the young man. He had better reflexes than any of the Hit Wizards, but still needed help with a sleeping bag. She waved her wand and six extra squashy sleeping bags and pillows appeared. "They probably won't be as squashy as Auror Tonks' but they will be good enough for an evening. Harry about choked on the unintended double-entendre. Not noticing Harry's reaction, Bones continued, "Harry, you did a fantastic job tonight, first in thinking of everyone's safety, second in capturing a very elusive criminal."

"You're welcome. Director Bones, you may want to contact Minister Diggory. I was there when Pettigrew murdered his son Cedric."

Amelia shuddered at the thought. "Of course. He will certainly want to know. I'll tell him immediately. Thank you Harry. I need to talk to the

Grangers for a moment, and then leave. Can you arrange the sleeping bags?"

"Certainly. Dobby and Winky?"

Pop, Pop. "Yes, Harry Potter sir?"

"Winky, please make three different pizzas and have dinner ready in twenty minutes. Dobby, please put two sleeping bags in the bedroom across from yours, two more in the room next to it, and mine in the study.

Everyone's heart was still racing as they sat down for dinner. Harry had tried to make everyone feel at home, but it wasn't working. The reality of what had been averted was just beginning to sink in with Dan and Emma. Remus left immediately after Director Bones, doubtlessly to talk with Dumbledore. Ginny, who had hoped for a replay of the previous evening, could see her plans dashed. She had been awake most of the night. Harry felt like a lifetime vengeance had been lifted from his shoulders with Pettigrew in custody. Hermione felt a mixture of adrenalin, emotion over Sirius, and an unexplored feeling about Harry. She also sensed that Ginny was hoping to have a relationship with Harry.

The pizza was fantastic. Harry introduced Wink and Dobby to the Grangers, who aside from the goblins had never seen a magical creature before. Averting a possible confrontation, Harry explained that Dobby and Winky had asked Harry if they could come and work for him a few weeks earlier. Emma had asked for a tour of the house. Starting with the entryway, it looked brighter and lighter than it ever had. The additional lights that Harry had added, along with the work that Dobby and Winky had done scrubbing, painting, and refinishing the woodwork had made a fantastic improvement to the house.

Hermione remembered the black curtains hiding Mrs. Black's portrait, and the disgusting troll leg umbrella stand that had been in the entrance. Now she saw a bright, light, inviting room. Many of the rooms had been locked or were off limits to Hermione when she had spent time there last summer. In reality, she had only seen about half of the house. Gone were the Doxy infested curtains, threadbare rugs,

peeling wall coverings and soot stained ceilings from the gaslight lamps. Gone were the disgusting elf heads and nosey portraits. In their place were a light finish oak floor, matching woodwork, white walls, bright lights and open, clean windows. Without the worn out or museum furniture, she came to realize the size and beauty of the home.

Dan was amazed when Harry told him that one of the Professors and he had put in all of the electric in one afternoon. There must have been thousands of feet of electrical wires alone. When asked how they had gotten it all done, Harry replied, "Sir, we used hard work and magic to do the wiring." Dan nodded in amazement.

Harry had to pry Hermione out of his library, promising her that she could look at it another day. There wasn't too much to see yet on the second floor. The only room that was furnished and occupied was Dobby and Winky's. Harry respected their privacy and didn't open the door. In fact, he had never been in the room. Glad that he had done as Dumbledore had advised him, Hermione gave Harry an approving nod when he said who the room belonged to.

They reached the third level. Emma was amazed at the size of the open area. Dobby had done a fantastic job. The floor shined like a brand new gymnasium and the white walls gleamed! Hermione mentioned that there was no electricity in the room. Harry replied that this was the room where they would be practicing magic. Hermione was curious at his statement. She interpreted practicing magic to mean practicing dueling and fighting, but didn't understand how he could do that without a license, or who "they" were. Harry sensed her questions, but did not answer either one.

It was the study that Harry believed to be the jewel of the house. The desk and the furniture were the sort that any CEO would be delighted with, commanding respect. They were extremely well crafted, and by any use of the word, elegant. Emma noted the view into the park, and commented that it must be a fantastic view during the day. The electric lights that Flitwick and Harry had added only served to brighten the room, and make it seem bigger.

While everyone enjoyed the tour of Harry's home, their minds were all wondering what was happening at the Granger's home.

Meanwhile, Amelia had assembled a dozen of the Aurors and Hit Wizards to watch the Granger house. Senior Auror Dawlish and Hit Wizard Michael Wood were leading the operation. They had Strighthand, Woodson, Smithwick, McNair, four first year Aurors and two other Hit Wizards. Wood's younger brother Oliver, knew the Granger girl whose house was expected to be attacked. Wood seriously doubted that anything would happen given that Voldemort's best men were all captured in a single evening a month ago.

For several hours, nothing happened. The hit Wizards standing watch outside were convinced that Bones had just assembled them so she could ask for more budget money and grow her department.

Shortly before midnight, hell was unleashed. Death Eater Travers was silently directing several of the brand new Death Eaters into position in the back garden. Mid-level Death Eaters Draco, Bulstrode, Crabbe, Goyle, Flint, and Goyle Senior were less experienced, but had previously been on operations. Serving as backup were Snape, Bellatrix and Voldemort himself!!!

Snape had been told that Pettigrew had been captured and as such was expecting an empty house. Unknown to him two things had occurred – There were a dozen ministry Aurors and Hit Wizards waiting in or just around the house. Secondly Voldemort had secretly cast anti-apparation wards around the house and surrounding garden.

Unknown to the Death Eaters, the Granger house had a mid-level security system, and a good set of outdoor floodlights. The surprises on either side would prove to be deadly.

The battle that ensued was brief, but brutal. Inside the house, Woodson saw the motion detector flicker several times, and then the yard lights went on. For a moment, the Aurors had an advantage. They hit Bulstrode, Flint, Crabbe and Goyle in the first volley. Seconds later Draco, Travers and Goyle Sr. burst in through the front

door, set fire to the house in six places then left to set additional fires to the outside of the home. Bellatrix had seen two of the Hit Wizards who were hiding outside in the back garden, and killed one. Voldemort killed the other.

Sensing that the situation was rapidly getting out of hand, the Aurors inside the house attempted to apparate away, but couldn't. Realizing that option was gone, they re-cursed the fallen Death Eaters with Reducto spells, causing massive tissue damage in each of them. The last thing that Dawlish saw were the evil red eyes of Voldemort as the green light leapt from his wand.

Outside, Wood saw movement, and blew Snape's shoulder off with a well-placed Reducto spell. Bellatrix fired in kind just as Wood pressed his emergency portkey to get back to the Ministry. By the time that the Grangers' security alarm had automatically summoned the fire department, there were seventeen bodies in the house and back garden. The flaming home was illuminating the area as smoke began to fill the sky.

Amelia saw Wood portkey back and immediately knew the worst had happened. She'd had the foresight to have several healers on hand. It did not look good for Wood. The Healers had cauterized his shoulder, but he had lost most of his blood. Not wanting to lose his recollection of the event, she summoned her Solicitor's Pensive and told a convulsing Wood to extract his memory of the event. He handed her his bloody wand holding the gossamer fine strand of his memory. It was the last thing that he ever did.

She immediately called most of the Department Heads. Within minutes there were Photographers, Obliviators, most of the Investigative Aurors and several reporters from The Daily Prophet at the site.

The neighbors within a two block radius were obliterated and stunned. By the time daybreak came, the bodies had all been moved to the Ministry Morgue, the yard swept for wands, cloaks, and Death Eater paraphernalia. The Granger home had been destroyed, but the muggle fire department had attributed it to a gas leak explosion.

It was a dispirited and exhausted Amelia Bones that faced Wizengamot Head Albus Dumbledore and Minister Amos Diggory at seven Sunday morning. She briefed them regarding the preparation for the raid, and then played Wood's dying memory for them. Dumbledore watched the memory with a keen eye, stopping and replaying scenes as needed. When it was done Diggory, asked Bones about the tally.

"On our side, we lost two Senior Aurors, seven Aurors and three Hit Wizards. The dark side lost six – Vincent Crabbe, Greg Goyle, Goyle Sr. Marcus Flint, Millicent Bulstrode, and Severus Snape." Amelia continued. "We were outmarshaled and outgunned."

Dumbledore who had much more tactical experience than Diggory silently agreed with her assessment. The Aurors had been as surprised at the size of the attack, the anti-apparation warding, and the presence of Voldemort as the Death Eaters were of finding anyone other than the Grangers home. Severus was obviously not expecting anything other than to see one of his least favorite student's empty home torched. Sensing that a good person was about to offer her resignation, Dumbledore tried to head it off. "Director you have not told the entire story. Please relate the events leading up to the raid."

To Diggory's delight, she told of the capture of his son's killer and the evacuation of the Grangers from their home. He replied, "Excellent news, Director. Who is responsible for those events?"

"Harry Potter Sir." She relayed what Harry and Hermione had told her.

"Where are the Grangers right now? Have you personally have verified their safety?"

"They are at Potter's home sir. I visited them myself." Bones was amazed that he worried so much about Potter and the Grangers, while showing so little grief for the dead. Obviously he had learned to look ahead rather than behind.

"Excellent. Let's get cleaned up and meet back in fifteen minutes. Then we will go see them and make our visits."

At 8:00 Dobby answered the door. Dumbledore, Bones, and Diggory walked in. Winky had made a large breakfast. Ginny, Hermione, and Emma were wearing different colored pairs of the silk pajamas that Harry had bought for Ginny. Harry and Dan were dressed. Winky was serving sausages, eggs, bacon, pancakes, fruits, coffee, tea, and orange juice. Seeing them, she immediately put out three more place servings.

Ginny was unusually apprehensive seeing the three officials there. She had expected to see Director Bones return and was not surprised to see Professor Dumbledore. Minister Diggory would only be there for one reason – death. Noticing that she had started shaking, Harry held her hand under the table.

Diggory started. “Mr. Potter, I must congratulate you on your actions last night. The capture of Peter Pettigrew brings a lot of closure for my wife Britt and myself, as I’m certain that it does for you. With Pettigrew’s capture, all charges against Sirius will be dropped, and a formal public Ministry apology will be issued.” For a moment, Harry felt the weight of the world slip from his shoulders.

“On to less fortunate matters, Dr. Granger your home was raided last night as Mr. Potter predicted, with tragic results. Your home was destroyed and eighteen people were killed.” Ginny had tears running down her face, convinced that it had been her family that had been killed.

Hermione beat Ginny in asking “who?”

“Nine Aurors, three Hit Wizards, and six Death Eaters were killed.”

Ginny who had been saying a prayer that she had not lost her family was now preparing to hear that the Order had been decimated. Dumbledore sensing her apprehension said, “Miss Weasley, the complete list has not been released. I believe the only names that would be familiar to you are: Greg Goyle, Vincent Crabbe, Marcus

Flint, Millicent Bulstrode, Severus Snape, and Senior Auror Dale Dawlish.”

Harry eased what could have been an extremely uncomfortable situation by saying, “Director Bones, I am sorry to hear of the loss of your Aurors and Hit Wizards. If they were anything like the Aurors that I have met, the world will be a lesser place without them. Is there anything that any of us could do to help you?”

Hermione and Ginny were amazed and proud at the grace that their friend had just displayed. Director Bones had a tear in her eye. The lost Aurors were good men and women. She replied, “Harry, you could be of great help. Senior Auror Shacklebolt and Auror Tonks will escort the Grangers back to their home today. If you have a trunk that they could borrow to put their belongings into, that would be fantastic.”

Dumbledore added, “Harry, if you would be willing to put the Grangers up for a while, I’m certain that they would appreciate it. I believe Mundungus will be here any minute with your new furnishings. If Miss Weasley would be willing to help you get things organized, I would expect that the Grangers would be back here by mid-afternoon.” A moment later he added, “Harry is there anywhere else that you may need a portkey to?”

Harry thought for a moment and asked, “Would it be possible to get a portkey that would take us to Harrods and back Professor?” Harry handed him a ruler. “This would work well.”

“Certainly Harry.” Dumbledore closed his eyes, placed his wand on the ruler and said, “Portus.” The ruler glowed blue for a moment then returned to its normal state.

Bones and Diggory got ready to leave. They had twelve visits to make this morning. Diggory shook Harry’s hand. Harry hugged Amelia, softly saying, “I’m sorry Director. I wish I could have done more. I’m glad that you weren’t hurt.”

She hugged him back and softly replied, "I'm glad that you weren't hurt either Harry." The two officials opened up the back door and vanished.

Dumbledore came back into the kitchen. "Miss Weasley, do you have sufficient clothing that you could loan to the Grangers?"

Ginny nodded. She had a larger wardrobe now than anytime in her life. "Come on, I'll get everything that you need."

Dumbledore said to Dan, "Dr. Granger, I think it would be advisable that you and your family remained here for at least a few weeks. Could you and Dr. Granger take that much time off from your practice?" Dan nodded, realizing that he literally had dodged a bullet last night. Dumbledore said, "Mr. Potter has a mobile telephone that I'm certain that he would loan to you to help you make the appropriate arrangements."

Chapter 8

Walking through the wreckage of his home was a gut-wrenching experience for Dan Granger. Realizing that it had not been the result of an accident or misfortune both frightened and angered him. His family had never hurt anyone in their lives. He realized that his daughter had been targeted due to her ability and some crazed racial prejudice. Hermione certainly wasn't to blame.

He picked up items that he'd taken for granted yesterday and now thought of as priceless – An undamaged photo album, books, some of Emma's jewelry, some hand tools from the car park, and remarkably, Hermione's school trunk. It had been scorched and soaked, but otherwise appeared intact. Most of his important papers were at his surgery. The house insurance would cover everything.

Hermione was having similar thoughts, but was thinking of Hagrid rummaging through the Potter home fifteen years ago. She wondered what he had found? Harry had never said. He claimed not to have any of his parent's possessions other than his father's invisibility cloak that Dumbledore had given him, no, returned to him for Christmas first year. Yet it was obvious that even after a disaster, there were hundreds of items to be collected. Where had their things gone?

Dan wanted to drive his untouched BMW that he had parked on the street back to Harry's home then realized that he didn't know where Harry lived. Kingsley looked around, saw no one, shrunk the car, and put it in his jacket pocket! "I'll set it right when we get to where you need to be, Sir." Kingsley looked around again, closed and shrunk the trunk, and placed it in his pocket. Hermione held her mother's hand. Emma had been weeping nonstop, seeing the wreckage of her life.

Dan looked over at the two Aurors waiting patiently for them. "We're ready," he said. A minute later they were greeted at the door by the oddly dressed little elf.

While the Grangers had been sorting through the wreckage of their home, Mundungus had arrived with Harry's new belongings. Harry decided that the first charm that he had ever learned was indeed magic. He floated the bed frames, mattresses, box springs, dressers and nightstands up the stairs and into the proper rooms. Ginny was behind him with towels, mattress covers, sheets, and blankets, bedspreads, pillows and pillowcases. Harry asked her which room she'd like to have. She gave him an innocent look and said, "The one next to yours of course." Harry winked at her. She made up the other beds while Harry was placing the area rugs for the entertainment room. Mundungus had left him extra television cable and extension cords if he needed them.

Harry was about half done when the Grangers returned. Tonks offered to take the Grangers to Harvey Nichols department store to get some things to wear. Hermione and Emma agreed to go. Dan said that he would stay and help Harry if he could. Harry handed Tonks 6,000 Pounds Sterling and asked her to insist that they use it. Tonks squeezed Harry's arm and teased him that he always took exceptional care of his houseguests. Harry responded by growing his hair out an inch. They winked at each other and the three women left.

Dan walked into the entertainment room to ask how he could help. He watched silently as Harry floated rugs and sofas here and there trying to get the best fit. While it had been a part of his life for the last five years, Dan had rarely seen magic performed. It was fascinating to see someone mentally project objects through the air. It was terrifying to him to understand that a witch or wizard like this young man could injure or kill someone with just a thought or a word. Not wanting to startle Harry, Dan waited until everything was on the ground, knocked on the doorframe, and asked, "Harry, how can I help you?"

Harry turned around and replied, "I'm about done here. We can start on the shades and come back to hook everything up later. I need to rest for a moment first. Can I get you a butterbeer?"

"Please."

POP – Winky was holding a tray with biscuits and four butterbeers. "Thank you Winky."

Dan was amazed. "Harry, how did you do that?"

"Magic, sir."

"Dan, Harry. OK?"

"Yes sir. Dan." They grinned at each other and had their butterbeers. The new chairs were very comfortable. Harry asked, "Were you able to collect much stuff from your home?"

Dan shook his head and put down his butter beer. "Not much, but more than I expected. I did find an undamaged photo album. That probably meant the most to me.

"I'd like to see it if you have the chance. Photos are important. Almost anything else can be repurchased."

"Dan nodded. "You sound like a man speaking from experience."

Harry nodded. "All I own from my parents is a cloak and a book of photos. Their home was destroyed too."

Harry finished his butterbeer. Dan asked how he could help. Harry showed him the diagram with the window measurements that he had made. They numbered the boxes containing the new shades based on the diagram. Harry waved his wand and each of the boxes floated into the appropriate room. They started in the first bedroom. Dan opened the box and showed Harry how it should go. Harry realized that he didn't have a screwdriver. Dan went to get one out of his house item trunk. He came back with two. Dan held up the honeycomb draw shades while Harry willed the screwdrivers to do their thing. Two hours later they had all twenty-four shades installed.

Feeling rather proud of themselves, they found Ginny who was finishing with the linens. Dan went to collect the empty boxes and asked Harry where the trash bin was. Harry looked at the pile that Dan had created, muttered something and the empty boxes vanished! Dan stood there watching in utter amazement.

Dan was able to get the DVD, CD player, and television wired and connected properly within a few minutes. Harry was secretly glad that it was Dr. Granger rather than Mr. Weasley helping him. At least he didn't have to worry that everything would be taken apart when he wasn't looking. Fifteen minutes later the shoppers returned to see Ginny watching football on the television while Dan and Harry were snoring on their respective sofas. "Some things never change," quipped Emma.

Tonks had to leave to attend a meeting at the ministry. A fifth of the Aurors and all but one of the Hit Wizards had been lost last night, and there were sure to be lots of schedule changes.

Having learned the hard way of the risks of startling a powerful, sleeping wizard, Hermione gently nudged Harry. He woke and asked that they take any of the rooms that they like. Hermione took the room next to Ginny's and her parents took the room next to the other bathroom.

While they were putting their things away, Ginny found Harry and asked if she could cuddle up with him that night. Harry didn't want to offend anyone and asked that she be discreet. She reached up to give him a quick kiss and went to help Hermione. At dinner, Emma thanked Harry for his exceptional generosity, and promised to repay him for the clothing that they had purchased as soon as they get their affairs straightened.

Harry looked at her and said, "Dr. Granger, the last thing on my mind is worrying about the money that you needed this afternoon. Please don't give it a second thought. Please? My only concern is everyone's safety." Tears welled up in her eyes. She nodded thanks to the young man who had saved her life.

Hermione asked if Buckbeak was still in the house. Harry told her that Remus had taken him back to the forest. Seeing Dan's questioning look, Harry explained that Buckbeak was a magical creature – Half horse, half eagle that Sirius had been keeping. Hermione asked how they got the portrait of Mrs. Black down, and if anyone bought it.

Harry replied, "I gave her the choice of being blasted off along with the wall, or unsticking herself. She came down without a word." Harry didn't like where the conversation was going, but knew that Hermione would persist. He thought, 'Gryffindors charge forward.' He told her, "Ginny and I were carefully moving her to the pile of stuff to be given away when her evil house elf Kreacher tried to kill Ginny. I helped Ginny, but the portrait got impaled on the umbrellas that were in the troll leg umbrella stand."

Ginny said, "Harry killed that wicked thing before it could bite my neck off!!!"

"Yuck," said Mrs. Granger.

Harry said, "I'm sorry for bringing it up Ma'am."

"Sorry?" said Emma. "How many people in Britain can say that they have saved four people in a week?" Harry could feel his face getting red. "That's just Harry," said Ginny. "He's got that, people saving thing," said both witches at the same time smiling at each other. As if on cue, they both got up, and each kissed one of Harry's cheeks. Harry's face went tomato red. Dan and Emma looked at each other, snickered, and then broke into full laughter at his embarrassment.

As it got darker outside, Hermione noticed the difference in the home. Clean white walls, light colored wood and bright lights had really turned it into a home that someone would want to live in. At Harrods Hermione had purchased a selection of CDs, DVDs, a chess set and several decks of cards. They had a very enjoyable evening popping popcorn, playing Hearts, and watching television.

Meanwhile the Order was meeting at Hogwarts. Remus related Harry's capture of Pettigrew. Dumbledore related a summary of the battle at the Granger house. Kingsley, Hestia and Tonks were each silently glad that they had not been called in that night. No one could find fault with the original plan. Both sides expected that they would have had the element of surprise and numerical superiority.

Dumbledore had little to say when asked about Snape. "Severus had not mentioned being called when I talked with him earlier that evening. As such, I cannot say for certain. Severus was killed by Hit Wizard Wood moments before Wood was mortally wounded by Bellatrix. This is twice in less than a month that Voldemort personally took part in a battle." Several people shuddered. There wasn't a person in the room who individually felt that they would have stood a chance against Voldemort.

All six of the Weasleys came up to Dumbledore after the meeting and asked what had happened with Harry at the Grangers. Remus said that they had been shopping and had been invited over to the Grangers at the last minute.

Arthur asked, "So you feel certain that the Grangers had been the target, not Harry or our Ginny?"

"Absolutely," said Dumbledore. Remus nodded in agreement. Dumbledore continued, "Arthur there is virtually no way that Voldemort could have known that Remus, Harry, and Miss Weasley were there about to have dinner at the Grangers. Besides, the attack took place far later in the evening than they would have stayed."

The Weasleys seemed satisfied with his answer and went back to their conversation about their new financial good tidings. They asked more about Ginny. Dumbledore assured them that she was safe, happy, and in good hands.

"Harry, are you awake?" asked Ginny opening the door to his room and closing it behind her.

"Kind of. Come over here."

"Thanks. I've wanted to be with you all day."

"Me too."

Harry was laying on the leather sofa in front of the fireplace in his room staring at the fire. Ginny slid in front of Harry, who was on his side. She melted into him. Harry still half asleep kissed her thinking he was having the most wonderful dream.

"Please hold me Harry. whispered Ginny" Harry tentatively put his arm around her over the blanket. Ginny found his hand, took it under the blanket and placed it on her warm stomach.

She whispered, "That's better, don't you think?"

Harry nuzzled her neck. "You don't mind? I might accidentally..."

"Harry I like being by you. You'll be fine. Don't worry. Get some rest."

Harry rested very well that night, even if he didn't get much sleep.

Harry opened his eyes thinking about vanilla. Ginny looked like an angel next to him. Waking up a bit more, he ascertained that his hands were being held by hers. 'Neither can live while the other survives.' 'So long Tom,' thought Harry. 'I've found someone to live for and your days are numbered.' Harry kissed Ginny on the neck and carefully got up. He tucked Ginny in and looked at his watch. 4:45. He went to the kitchen and found a Coke then went to the library. He started reading his texts with a passion that he had never had before. 'I will beat him and raise a clan of little Potters, Sirius. You will look down at us someday and be so proud.'

At 7:00 Dobby popped in. "Here is your paper Harry Potter sir. Breakfast is ready" Harry thanked his friend and looked at the headline as he walked into the kitchen.

Fierce Battle in Crawley – 18 Killed

(London – Rita Skeeter)

Twelve Ministry Aurors and Hit Wizards were killed early Sunday 15 July in an ambush-gone-bad at a witch's residence in Crawley. By far

the largest battle since the return of Voldemort, it was also the deadliest. Minister of Magic Diggory announced that six Death Eaters had been killed in the battle. There were no witnesses to the battle. Muggle fire fighters initially reported finding the bodies. Law Enforcement Director Bones was quoted as saying the British Isles are a lesser place without the men and women who gave their lives defending what is right. See page 14 for a complete list of names. See page 15 for additional photos.

There was no mention of Pettigrew or the specifics of the information that Hit Wizard Wood had been able to provide. The Grangers were not specifically mentioned, and the address was not given out. Harry handed the extra newspaper to the Grangers. He asked Ginny if he could borrow her owl for the morning, and went to write a quick note.

Albus and Remus arrived just as everyone was finishing breakfast. Remus had arranged to pick up the Grangers post every morning and had found several home design books for them as well. They had a lot of arrangements to take care of getting their home rebuilt. He explained that the wreckage had been magically removed over the evening to expedite the process. If their property had not been situated squarely in the middle of a muggle neighborhood, Flitwick could have assembled a set of delivered construction materials for them in a day.

Harry turned over his study to Dan and Emma to work in. Hearing of their needs, he carefully transfigured a scrap of wood into a nice worktable that they could use for looking at blue prints and to hold the needed papers that they would acquire in rebuilding their home. Harry gave them his cellular telephone so they could make the calls that they needed. They would stay very busy for the next few weeks.

Dumbledore, Remus, and Harry went into the library to discuss training options. Like Dumbledore, Remus had his own opinions. He had been waiting his entire life to find his personal destiny, and realized that this could be his chance. Yet Remus couldn't say that he possessed world-class dueling skills, or outstanding skills in any area,

except perhaps stealth. Being a werewolf had to be good for something.

After they had all sat down, Harry began. "Professor, the prophecy implies that I have to kill Voldemort in order to live my life. I fully accept that responsibility. I don't believe that I currently possess anywhere near enough skill to be successful. According to the Daily Prophet, twelve Aurors and Hit Wizards were killed last week by a force of approximately equal size. Dr. Granger told me the other day that their home had quite a good security system with motion detectors outside, and yard lights. Based on that, I would guess that the Ministry wizards were able to fire the first volley. As such, they apparently killed Crabbe, Goyle, Bulstrode, and Flint early in the battle. Assuming that took place, a dozen of the ministry's finest got beat by a force that probably wasn't as large in size. My guess is that the Death Eaters who were there included Malfoy, Bellatrix, Voldemort, and a few others. My question is if things had turned against the Aurors, why didn't they portkey away? A wooden house isn't worth dying over. What went wrong?"

Remus was astounded at Harry's analysis. Harry had cut to the critical issues in seconds. Remus doubted that the ministry officials could have reached the same conclusion even after a dozen meetings.

Dumbledore responded. "Harry, your analysis is indeed accurate. Voldemort had apparently warded the house and the grounds with an anti-apparation spell before launching his attack. We know their approximate number based on the memories recovered from one of the dying Hit Wizards. Just out of curiosity, why did you name Malfoy and Bellatrix as possible attackers?"

Harry put down his butter beer. "That's easy Professor, Malfoy was the common link to the Death Eaters that had been students, much more so than Snape." Dumbledore was about to correct Harry regarding Severus' title, when he realized that it didn't matter any more. Harry continued. "Bellatrix seems to just like killing people. Why would she want to miss out on the chance? My guess is this was some sort of training mission. Did the witches and wizards get killed, or were they trapped in the burning house?"

Dumbledore replied, "Based on what we know and found, most had been inside the house. Some of the Death Eaters had set multiple fires to the home then magically sealed the doors and windows. Harry did you have a vision regarding this attack?"

"No Professor. Their best Death Eaters were captured last month except for Bellatrix. I couldn't imagine them losing so badly unless they had somehow been trapped. Has Pettigrew been interrogated?"

"No. Director Bones' group is still reeling over their losses. I'm certain that they will get that handled this week. Information about him will be kept out of the papers for another week. What would you ask him and what would you do with the information?"

Harry rubbed the stress from his face. "Professor I saw about thirty Death Eaters the night Riddle was returned to his body. You may have a more accurate count than that, but that said, he lost eleven last month. He has obviously been recruiting since then to get back to that number. Most of those killed also were members of a group that Umbridge had started when she was at school - the inquisitorial squad. Anyway, I would try and get some names and would attempt to capture or defeat them one at a time. Voldemort wouldn't be there and they probably could be ambushed one or two at a time unless he has some sort of clubhouse where they are all living at."

Dumbledore was impressed with what he had heard. "These are exceptional ideas that you have expressed Harry. I shall pass them onto Director Bones from you this afternoon. Back to the subject at hand, Sirius had left you a letter expressing advice regarding your schooling and training for the next few years. It was good of him to consider these options for you. Before we go much further, I suggest that we conduct some type of skills assessment. I am not talking about theory or OWL results, rather your practical ability. You obviously excel at tactics and quick thinking. Your survival against multiple encounters with Riddle has proven that. Remus tells me that you have cleared out the third floor for use as a training room. Let's go up and try it out for a bit."

They opened the doors to the library. If Hermione and Ginny had been listening, they at least got away cleanly. Dumbledore, Remus and Harry went up the stairs and into the large open area. Dumbledore conjured a set of safety goggles for Harry to wear that had his corrective prescription, and asked him to put them on. Harry was instructed that Dumbledore and Remus would fire red and green sparks at him, nothing more. Harry was to evade the sparks and not get hit. Before they started, Dumbledore had cast an impervious charm on the walls, ceiling and floor so the room would not be damaged or marked. Remus stood at one end and Harry the other. The room was about 70 by 40 feet. As Remus fired the sparks, Harry had just fractions of a second to move. Harry practiced avoiding them by running to the right or left, not moving if the shot was wide to begin with, moving his upper body as needed, ducking or rolling. After an exhausting half hour, they took a break. Ginny and Hermione were at the door watching and wanted to join in. "Be careful what you wish for," advised Dumbledore. Dumbledore conjured two other sets of safety goggles. Ginny tried first. She was nearly as quick as Harry and every bit as nimble. In a hundred shots, she was only hit ten times. Hermione did not fair as well. Neither as quick, nor as nimble as either, she was hit about seventy times. Harry had left to change into workout clothing while the girls were being sparked at. He returned, and said, "OK Remus, now that you are warmed up, I'll try against you." Harry did this primarily to make the girls feel better. He was relatively certain that Hermione had been hit a few times and was probably feeling bad about it. Remus was neither fast nor especially quick. However he was quite nimble. It took Harry about twenty tries before he hit Remus the first time. By the last twenty-five tries, he hit his old professor nearly every time. Harry thought of Winky, who popped into the room carrying a tray of refreshments and biscuits.

Harry told Ginny and Hermione that they would meet them down for lunch in a few minutes. Dumbledore suggested that they continue their discussions after lunch. His inclination was to include the two young women, reasoning that if they were going to be spending time with Harry anyway, it would be better for all concerned if they could capably defend themselves. He would talk with Molly in the next day or so, and the Doctors immediately after lunch. Dumbledore wanted

the best for Harry, and wanted to remain personally involved in the training.

Winky had prepared a wonderful lunch for them that included homemade soup, fresh baked bread, salad, tea, and butterbeer. The little elf seemed very happy in her new role. She beamed at Harry when he told her that he liked everything that she had prepared and thanked her. Dumbledore told the Grangers that Harry would be receiving supplemental lessons over the summer. He mentioned that Hermione had expressed an interest in attending them as well. Emma asked a few questions regarding the content. Dumbledore told her they would include defense, physical conditioning, mental conditioning, apparation, and advanced transfiguration. After conversing together for a moment, they came back and said that they thought they sounded like a fine idea. Heading off any protest from Ginny, Dumbledore said that he would go talk with Molly that afternoon or the next day.

That settled, Remus said that he would take the three of them back to Harrods that afternoon. He wanted to get a good set of workout equipment for their use. They took the portkey that Dumbledore had made them. Remus selected a professional level model that had seven different stations so each of them could work out at once if they wanted to. Hermione and Ginny went to get some workout clothing and some additional CDs and DVDs that they could listen to and watch. Harry also bought some gymnastic mats that they could put down and avoid bruising as easily. Fifty-six hundred pounds later, they left the store.

While the four of them were out spending Harry's money, Dumbledore was visiting Amelia. She was amazed as he related Harry's comments and suggestions. Her remaining Aurors hadn't come up with anything as insightful when she had held the department wide meeting that morning. Just as he was getting ready to leave Dumbledore requested a conditional use of magic permit for Hermione, saying that several of the Hogwarts staff had volunteered to provide NEWT level training to the three over the summer. As she signed the permit and handed it to Dumbledore, Bones asked

Dumbledore if it would be possible to have her grand-niece Susan attend the training as well. Dumbledore said that he had no objections, but he would ask Harry, since it was his house and money that was being spent. Amelia said that she would ask Susan if she had an interest, and contact Dumbledore later that evening.

After leaving the Ministry Dumbledore went back to Grimmauld place. Dobby let them in. He told the little elf, "You certainly made wonderful improvements to Mr. Potter's home Dobby. I doubt that the third floor looked as good on the day that the home was built." Dobby beamed at Dumbledore. Dumbledore reminded Dobby that Harry's location was a secret and that he should not mention him in the event that he was out shopping or anything.

Dumbledore found the three listening to a CD in the entertainment room and reading. "Ah, the Goldberg Variations. They are a wonderful choice. Miss Granger, Director Bones asked me to deliver this to you." He handed her the Use of Magic license. Hermione's eyes grew wide as she read the terms and conditions.

"Use it well, Miss Granger. If the three of you would like to discuss schedules, we can begin. Would 8:00 AM be too early to begin during the weekdays? Seeing no look of dissent on their faces, he conjured a chalkboard and chalk. "I would like you up, dressed and fed by 8:00. At that time you would have practical Charms until 10:00. From 10:30 – 12:30 you would have practical Transfiguration. From 2:00 – 4:00 you would have defense, including dueling, fighting, attack, and physical exercise. Very little of what you will be learning would overlap with your schoolwork." They agreed and Dumbledore pulled Harry aside for a minute sitting the down on one of the rust leather sofas. "Harry I would ask that we try this for two weeks and then decide on the other options. I am not trying to dissuade you from either of the suggestions that Sirius gave you, rather to realistically assess your skill levels, and provide some additional foundation knowledge that can be applied when dueling or fighting. Please accept this offer."

Harry could see the logic in Dumbledore's suggestion, and quickly agreed.

Dumbledore was getting ready to leave, when he remembered Amelia's request about Susan. "Harry, was Susan Bones in your defense group?"

"Yes Professor. She attended every meeting, and did well. Why do you ask?"

"Director Bones inquired if you would consider letting Susan attend the classes for the next two weeks. It could be advantageous, as I had considered having Kingsley teach part of the defense lessons next week, and she would ensure his availability, in terms of schedule. She would provide her own apparel," he said, his silver mustache quivering with a smile. Harry's face grew slightly red as Dumbledore glanced over at Ginny and Hermione in their new exercise outfits.

'Sure beats a baggy sweatshirt,' thought Harry

Dumbledore smiled, guessing what Harry was thinking. "Harry, there is one other thing. If we are on good enough terms again, I would like you to consider taking Occlumency and Legilimency lessons with me. I was wondering if doing these from 4:00 – 5:30 would be too much. I apologize for intruding on your request to Minerva, but your knowledge of the prophecy would preclude you from using an instructor that isn't absolutely trustworthy." Harry nodded in understanding. "How many people have you told all or part of it to?"

"Two. Ginny and Tonks."

Dumbledore nodded. "You should consider telling Miss Granger in the next few days as well. Is there anything else that you believe that you will need to begin?"

"I would like a book list if we need to get anything, some healing potions, and wrist wand holders for Ginny, Hermione, and Susan. I will have someone get more towels and linens. Will we need any other equipment for defense class or any of the other classes? Will we need tables or anything?"

"I will provide all of the other equipment that you need Harry. Can you tell me please, what is currently down in the cellar?"

"I have no idea. Remus packed the entire potion-making laboratory up and sent it to the castle. I haven't been down there since. Are you looking for something or somewhere?"

"Somewhere. Let me think about it. I have two other questions for you right now. What did you do with the weapons that were in the house? Also did anything happen regarding Miss Tonks that I should know about?"

Harry choked for a moment. "I have them in the closet in my room, and she showed me how to change my hair."

This was not the answer that Dumbledore had expected regarding the young Auror. "Really? Could you possibly show me?" Dumbledore's face grew into a wide smile as Harry's hair went from slightly shaggy to shoulder length in less than a minute. "Harry, that's fantastic! Could you possibly picture it being the same auburn color as Miss Weasley's?" Dumbledore was amazed. Harry's normally raven black hair had indeed changed to match Ginny's. "Harry, how much effort is it to hold that color?"

"Quite a bit actually, but I've never changed the color before."

Dumbledore encouraged Harry to hold it for a few minutes before finally changing his hair back to black. After he had changed it back both in length and color. Dumbledore patted Harry on the shoulder. "That was brilliant Harry! I have only met a handful of Metamorphmagus witches in my life. You are the first wizard that I have met with this ability."

"Professor, there aren't any books on that sort of thing in my Library. Could I work with Tonks again sometime?"

"Of course Harry. I'll arrange it for later in the week. Please don't mention this ability to anyone else."

"Ginny knows about it, but I won't mention it to anyone else."

“Very good Harry. I will have Susan arrive tomorrow morning at 8:00. Thank you for allowing her to be a guest in your home. You will begin tomorrow at 10:30 with Professor McGonagall. I must leave now. Enjoy your evening.”

Chapter 9

Wednesday morning before leaving for Grimmauld Place, Minerva was reading the Daily Prophet and an article caught her eye.

Slain Aurors' Families are Given a Hand

(London – Rita Skeeter)

Gringotts spokesgoblin Ragnot announced today that the families of the twelve slain Aurors and Hit Wizards each received a donation of 20,000 Galleons. Ragnot said that the funds came from the Sirius Black Foundation War Relief Fund. Fund Administrator Griphook said that the families of the Aurors and Hit Wizards had suffered enough loss in their fight against Voldemort without suffering financial loss too. This reporter applauds the benefactor behind these remarkable donations.

She never had felt so proud of one of her students before. 'Two hundred and forty thousand points to Gryffindor, Mr. Potter.' She showed the article to Flitwick, who was equally amazed at his generosity.

Amelia knocked on Harry's door at 8:00 AM. Dobby opened the door. Harry had ordered several sets of outfits for Dobby and Winky. Dobby was wearing a miniature tuxedo. Ginny thought he looked adorable in his outfit, and Winky obviously thought so too. The Grangers and the teenagers were at the table having another wonderful breakfast. Winky had made waffles with fruit toppings, bacon, coffee and various fresh squeezed fruit juices. Harry went out to the car park and greeted Susan. He told her that the home had been warded with the Fidelius charm to keep it hidden and showed her the slip of paper to read. They walked in together with Harry carrying her trunk. Winky put down two more place settings and invited the Bones to join them. Harry introduced Susan to the Grangers, Dobby and Winky. She was slightly taller than either Ginny or Hermione, and not as thin. Her light brown hair was medium length nearly to her shoulders, and she had interesting hazel eyes. Harry did not know her well, other than from

the ill-fated D.A. group of last winter. He knew her to be a very kind and soft-spoken young woman. He also knew her to be very good with spell work and herbology.

After breakfast Harry showed Susan to her room, and Amelia departed a few minutes later. Ginny showed Susan around the home while Harry spent a few minutes with Winky asking her to get a few more things for the house. A few minutes later, Professor McGonagall came in. After making the introductions, McGonagall and the four teens went up to the third floor room.

She conjured a table and five chairs for them to sit at. "Mr. Potter, how many times have you seen the killing curse performed?"

Harry thought for a minute. He'd seen it twice as a baby, and once in class with the fake Moody. Pettigrew had cast it killing Cedric in front of his eyes. He'd dodged it about eight times in the graveyard at Little Hangleton, and about four times in the lobby of the Ministry of Magic. "Sixteen times, Professor."

Minerva thought that she was going to be ill on the spot. She'd had no idea that Harry had witnessed it so many times. For nearly a minute she said nothing with her eyes closed, instead comprehending what horrors he must have been subjected to. She promised herself that she would never scold him again for anything. 'Gryffindors charge ahead'

"Miss Bones, is there a block to the killing curse?"

Susan thought about the question for a moment. Her parents had been murdered, probably by the killing curse. "None that I know of Professor."

Hoping that he would give the answer that she was looking for, Minerva asked, "Harry how many of the fifteen times resulted in a death?"

Ginny was tempted to go over and hug Harry, but held back. He answered, "Three times, Professor."

Minerva was relieved. "Harry, could you tell us about some of the other times please?"

"Mostly they were curses that Voldemort, Lucius Malfoy, or Bellatrix had fired at me. Sometimes I ducked, other times I'd hid behind something solid." He did not mention the time that he had been hit with the curse.

Minerva gave Harry as kind a look as he had ever seen from her. "We are all very glad that you did. What did you duck behind?"

Cemetery headstones or the marble statues at the ministry.

Precisely. Very few people know, but a solid rock such as limestone or marble will successfully block a killing curse. And what is marble? Miss Granger?"

"A metamorphic rock of made of calcium carbonate. Marble forms from recrystallized limestone." The other teens didn't know if they should be amazed or amused.

"Very good Hermione. The point is that transfiguration can easily be used as a defensive technique against the so-called unblockable curses. I am certain that Professor Dumbledore will teach you some new defensive block spells, and attacks, but you can always use what you know.

She demonstrated changing pebbles into rocks large enough to hide behind, changing sand into limestone and other simple techniques that could be used to block curses. For practice she conjured two baskets of tennis balls and paired them off.

Harry started off with Susan. She defended first while he tossed tennis balls at her. Each time she created some sort of solid object. Hermione was quicker at it than anyone of them, but no one was surprised. Transfiguration was one of her best subjects. The practical on-the-fly application of what had always been an exercise in precision was an interesting challenge for her.

After the lesson, she gave them each a book to read on apparation. She asked that they finish the book that evening.

She stayed for lunch. The subject of the money given to the slain Aurors never came up. It was not Harry's nature to brag about anything. She had so much respect for him. After lunch, Dumbledore came for the afternoon lesson, and McGonagall left. Each of the teenagers thanked her for helping them.

Dumbledore demonstrated several techniques for strengthening the power of a spell that was cast. After he was demonstrating and it came time for the teens to practice, he paired them off. Harry worked with Ginny. After a few minutes, it was obvious to Harry that they collectively needed practice on aiming as much or more than strengthening a spell.

Dumbledore looked at Harry to see if he had assessed the situation. Harry saw Dumbledore glance at Susan and Hermione. Harry nodded in understanding. Dumbledore called them all together, thanked them for their work and asked that they wear comfortable clothing for the next day session. He told Harry that they would begin their Occlumency lessons in a day or two, then left for the day.

After dinner Lupin came over and helped Harry. He conjured four sets of targets about the size of archery targets, and made thirty sets of dense cardboard targets with bull's-eyes that would mark where the sparks had hit. Harry explained that he wanted to give everyone some practice at accuracy. After Lupin left, Harry set up the targets. The girls came in the room and they practiced for an hour. It was obvious that they needed a lot more practice in that area.

After practice, they went to the entertainment room. Susan had brought a DVD for them to watch. They watched Caddy Shack, and found it to be very funny. Hermione and Susan looked longingly as Ginny sat next to Harry during the movie flipping pieces of popcorn at each other.

After the movie, the girls went off to discuss girl things. Harry went to the library where he noticed the portrait of Phineas. Harry thought

that he would ask if the old professor had any ideas regarding Voldemort.

“Professor Nigellus, can we talk for a while?”

“Certainly Mr. Potter. How can I help you?”

“Professor, did you ever have to kill a person?”

“No. Mr. Potter. I’m glad that I never had to face that task. Is such a task in front of you?”

“Yes. I’m just not sure...”

“Are you asking about technique, or ethics?”

“Both really, but can we talk about ethics first, and technique on another evening?”

“Certainly.” He proceeded to describe the wizarding law of his day on the subject, and the justifications or situations that would warrant such an action. Harry listened carefully as Nigellus described the dark wizards of his day and the efforts that had been made to capture them. In the end it typically came down to ending their reigns of terror by ending their lives. There had been no trials, and the victors were never questioned or asked to justify their actions.

It was late when Harry went up to his room. Going to the sofa as usual Harry was delighted when he found a little paper heart on the sofa.

On Thursday Minerva took the four students out to the garage. “You have each read the book that I gave you on the theory of apparation. It is the physical projection of a witch or wizard from one specific location to another specific location. It is the most common type of the wandless magics in that no wand is used to perform the magic. What we are going to try today is the mental projection of ourselves being in a slightly different space than the one that we currently occupy.

Susan, if you would please picture yourself standing in the other side of the car park.” For several minutes, nothing happened. Hermione tried next. After ten minutes, there was a loud POP, and Hermione was on the other side of the car park! She was exhausted, but quite proud of herself. Ginny tried next. She focused with all of her might, picturing herself standing on the other side. Nothing happened. She tried again. After ten minutes a warm feeling came across her face. POP. She was standing on the other side. Harry went over to Susan. He whispered something in her ear. She giggled for a moment then concentrated. Susan focused on picturing herself standing in the spot twenty feet ahead of her. POP. She was exhausted but had done it. The three teens went over to congratulate her. After a minute, they stepped back to give Harry room. He pictured the spot that he had in mind. Nothing happened. Remembering reading the instructions of focusing on visioning yourself already there, not getting there, Harry tried again. A few seconds later, a warm feeling flushed his face. Pop. Harry was standing twenty feet in front of where he had been standing!

McGonagall was quite surprised. Harry reappeared with the sound that most experienced wizards made, not the crash and bang that most students made. More surprising, Harry didn't look the least bit tired. She asked him if he would project himself back to his starting point. With a tiny pop, Harry reappeared a few seconds later. Apparation was something that came very easy to him. Again, he didn't look like he had expended any effort whatever. Minerva asked Harry if he knew of the alleyway behind the Pizza Hut three streets away. Harry nodded. Minerva asked Harry to meet her there in a minute. She disappeared. The other women watched him carefully. One moment he was standing there, and the next he was gone. “Over here, Mr. Potter.” Minerva was on the other side of the alleyway and down a bit. “Excellent results, Mr. Potter. Are you ready to go back?”

Harry nodded, and a moment later, he was standing right next to Hermione. She looked a bit put out. “Harry, I don't get it, we were all exhausted from this, and you projected yourself from place to place like it's nothing. I didn't even hear you come back. How did you do that?”

Susan smiled, "Be the ball Harry." She winked at him.

Harry grinned back. "It's one of the very few things that just comes naturally to me. I can't explain it."

Minerva came back a few minutes later holding two hot pizza boxes and a box of breadsticks. "I thought you would enjoy these for lunch. We will stop here for the day. I will see you all tomorrow. Enjoy your day." That said, she vanished and they went in to enjoy their lunch.

After lunch they went upstairs. Seeing as their instructor wasn't there yet, Harry suggested that they continue with the exercise from the other day, of dodging the red sparks. He found the three pairs of goggles that they had and transfigured a plastic pop bottle into a fourth pair. He paired Hermione and Susan off. Hermione was able to hit Susan about a third of the time. Harry watched his friend very closely as she cast the sparks. Harry suggested that she hold her arm higher and to focus her eye a bit more on the front of the wand to achieve a straighter aim. He spoke to her in a very soft voice pointing out that she was consistently aiming to the left of her target. He asked her to try again with Susan. Hermione went from hitting a third of the time to only missing a third of the time.

They switched off. Like Hermione, Susan had poor aim, but was a bit quicker in firing. Hermione was able to dodge most of her shots. Harry went over to Susan, and softly pointed out that she also should hold her wand higher and her arm straighter, so her sightline to the target was straighter. The second time, she was hitting Hermione nearly half of the time.

The instructor still had not arrived, so Ginny tried hitting Harry. Ginny's aim was true, but Harry proved to be a very elusive target. While Ginny came close to hitting Harry most of the time, she never made contact. Harry noticed that he could anticipate when Ginny was going to cast the red sparks. Ginny had a tendency to look at the place where she was going to cast, thus providing a "tell" that Harry could pick up.

As they took a break to have a butterbeer, Dumbledore appeared. He had been sitting invisible in the armchair in the corner. "Very good, all

of you. Everyone made improvement this afternoon. Miss Weasley what did you learn or observe?"

"I saw that being accurate is at least as important as being quick."

"Good. Miss Granger?"

"I learned that balance is important. Every time that I slipped, I got hit."

"Good. Miss Bones?"

"I realized that Harry is an excellent teacher."

Dumbledore smiled at her. "He does seem to have a knack for getting people to improve their skills. Mr. Potter?"

"I learned to watch your opponent's eyes to see if they would give away their intent."

"Excellent. I will borrow Mr. Potter for the rest of the lesson. I would like you to practice one sparker on two targets. Each shooter is to be given twenty-five tries. I have a prize for the sparker who gets the most hits. After you have each had a try, and have showered, please meet in the library."

They walked down to the library and sat down. Dumbledore wanted to begin the Occlumency lessons. He asked Harry what he knew about the subject.

"Honestly Professor, not a thing. Snape's entire dialogue on the subject consisted of the phrase "clear your mind." I need to know how to recognize an attack, how to stop one, and most importantly how to prevent one. If I can get that far, perhaps I can learn how to turn the tables on him."

Dumbledore recognized that Harry's voice carried little emotion. Harry was not exaggerating or carrying a grudge against their dead colleague, rather simply reporting a fact. He decided to start at the place that Severus had obviously neglected to begin at – the

beginning. "Harry, please consider this textbook on golf. The book is divided up into chapters. The chapters are organized logically. Each one is made up of pages, paragraphs, sentences, words and letters. I recall mentioning a phrase with you at the end of your first year regarding a well-organized mind. Consider please that you may have had in excess of a hundred thousand discrete thoughts today. Some involved tying your shoes, eating breakfast, noticing what Miss Granger or Miss Weasley were wearing, what was on the pizza that you were eating, and so on. Of that large number, how many would be worth shielding against an intrusion from Tom?"

"Not many sir," said Harry, slightly embarrassed that Dumbledore had noticed him staring at the witches.

"Precisely. Thus the act of clearing your mind is something like filing your important thoughts away into a filing cabinet at the end of the day. That way, if an invasion takes place until you have had the opportunity to realize that your attacker is probing your mind, they will run into thoughts of beige leotards and pepperoni slices, or even something as mundane as the Chudley Cannons losing again." Dumbledore pulled an old manuscript out of his pocket and resized it for Harry. If you have the opportunity this evening, please look at this. It may give you some ideas regarding methods of organizing your mind.

Dumbledore changed subjects on Harry. "You did very well today Harry. Minerva mentioned your success with apparation. With your permission, I would like to have Auror Tonks come and visit you tomorrow while the other three continue working on the basics of apparation. I have arranged for you to take your license exam tomorrow morning and continue working on appearance changes. Is that acceptable?"

Harry nodded.

"Your schedule is your own Harry. Please do not share any more regarding your extra lessons than you need to. The others should be here any minute. Perhaps Dobby or Winky could arrange..." POP. Winky had a tray of tea, coffee, cocoa, soda, and Butterbeer. Just

then Ginny, Susan, and Hermione came in. Each was wearing jeans and a skinny top.

Dumbledore smiled at the women. "Miss Bones, I have a book that I would like you to read this evening." He handed her a book on Occlumency. "Miss Weasley, you and I need to visit with your parents for a bit this evening to get their permission for you to continue taking advanced lessons and to get a permit signed. Mr. Potter and Miss Granger need to have a conversation as they are having dinner this evening at the Pizza Hut. Please be back by ten. The lessons tomorrow will be on mental defenses."

Harry and Hermione walked out the back door and walked the three streets to the Pizza Hut. They ordered and sat in the back corner booth. Hermione put a silencing charm around the booth after they had received their dinner. He told Hermione the contents of the prophecy, and related how angry he had felt that Dumbledore had hidden it from him over the years. He told her how Sirius had pleaded with Dumbledore just weeks before his death, arguing that the danger of him not knowing exceeded the risk of Voldemort finding out. He talked about his anger that Umbridge, Wormtail and another Death Eater were behind the death of his cousin, aunt and uncle.

As Hermione asked him about the vision that he had had that evening with Umbridge, an idea had come to her. It seemed that Voldemort always had the Death Eaters work with someone that they knew. Who did Umbridge know?

Harry thought about her question for a while and answered, "Fudge and Malfoy."

"Right. Fudge was still Minister at the time, so it would be easy enough to find out where he was that day, which leaves Malfoy."

Harry nodded. "Hermione, I don't think I ever told you this before. The Dursleys treated me horribly for my entire life. They usually kept me locked up in a cupboard under the stairs until I was eleven. My uncle threatened to beat me a hundred times over the years, and my aunt never did anything about it. Most of the time my cousin was horrible to me, using me as his personal punching bag, but they didn't

deserve to get blown up. Pettigrew has helped take away my entire family. Over what? A prophecy that a lunatic made.”

Harry spoke with resolve. “Hermione, I am going to hunt Umbridge and Malfoy down this summer. I’m not asking you to help me; I just want you to understand why I’m doing what I am doing. They’ve taken away all of my family and I won’t allow them to get away with it. They killed some good people, and tried to kill people that I love. I won’t let them try again.

Hermione was silent for a minute thinking about what Harry had said. To kill or be killed. Dumbledore had known about it for years. No wonder Harry left school looking like he’d aged ten years in an evening. Revenge was not a word that Harry had used, but it certainly was the unstated message. Harry had always been there for her, always. Had he just implied that he loved her? He had saved her life several times now. She felt like she owed him this. Satisfied with herself, she asked, “Harry, how can I help you? I will do anything that I can.”

Harry said, “We need to really train up so that we can subdue a Death Eater, defend ourselves properly and get them back to the holding cells at the Ministry. When they took Pettigrew away, they used an anti-apparation manacle of some sort. Maybe Tonks would get us a pair that we could use. Maybe we could get some dragon hide vests.”

Hermione had another subject on her mind, and couldn’t shake it. Gryffindors charge ahead, she thought. “Harry, are you dating Ginny?”

Harry was a bit evasive in his answer. “Aside from shopping at Harrods and going to Gringotts, this is the only time that I’ve been out of the house.” Hermione deserved an answer, but Harry wasn’t sure what the question really was. “Hermione, what are you really asking?”

“Have you two...?”

“No. Nothing like that. We’ve snuggled on the sofa a few times in front of the fireplace. That’s about it.” Harry was confused. He’d

always liked Hermione, and instinctively thought of her as his best friend, much more so than Ron. She had always been there for him and always believed him. Always. Yet he definitely felt different about Ginny. She was so warm and soft and, well different.

Gryffindors charge ahead. "Harry, could we ever be more than friends?"

Hermione deserved an answer, but Harry really didn't have one. The last thing in the world that he wanted was to lose her friendship. "Ever is a long time Hermione. A lot can happen. You're my very best friend. I..., Let's table this conversation for right now. We need to head back." Harry paid the check and they walked back to the brownstone. He didn't notice the tears in his best friend's eyes.

While Harry and Hermione were having pizza, Dumbledore and Ginny were being treated to one of Molly's delicious dinners. Molly accepted Dumbledore's offer to allow Ginny to take additional lessons over the holiday without any reservation whatever. Dumbledore said that Harry had supplied everything that she would need, and that she had gotten books for all of her classes.

Molly asked him if anything new had been found regarding the deaths of the Dursleys. Dumbledore mentioned that Bones was tracking down several leads, and hoped to have news in the next few weeks.

When Ginny got back to her room, she found two little paper hearts on her pillow.

The next morning, Hermione found her Mum in the entertainment room and asked if they could go walk to the store together for a moment. Remus went with them, staying a respectful distance behind, since they obviously wanted to talk about something.

Hermione asked her Mother a question that Emma never expected to hear from her daughter. "How do you catch a guy Mum?"

Stalling for a moment to collect her thoughts Emma said, "I assume that you're talking about Harry?"

Hermione nodded.

"Dear, you've been friends with him a long time. Do you think he is interested in having a girlfriend? He seems to have quite a number of balls in the air right now as it is."

Hermione knew that her Mum had gotten to the crux of the matter. "I don't know. I'm almost positive that Ginny likes him, and I think Auror Tonks likes him and I think Susan Bones likes him. Mum, he's famous, brave, cute, rich, very talented, and I want him so much. I just want Harry. I don't care about those other things."

"You may not dear, but they all go together. Also as a point of fact, he seems to be something of a lightning rod for bad things happening. I'm not saying that he causes them, but until the other Death Eaters get captured or go away, I don't see a lot of peace in his life. Are you prepared to deal with that risk?"

"Mum I think that is the reason that Ginny and I were invited to train with him this summer, so we can better protect ourselves. To better answer your question, yes I would like to be a major part in his life, and I am prepared to accept the risks that go with it. The wizarding world has a custom known as a life debt. I know that I owe him my life, but I want to give him my heart."

Emma turned and waved Remus over. She asked him about the life debt custom. He explained that the holder of a life debt was entitled to ask any one thing of the debtor, who needed to do it, sight unseen, no questions asked. If the witch or wizard refused, the only honorable alternatives were suicide or banishment from the wizarding world.

Emma was concerned at the implications of such a custom. Remus replied, "Dr. Granger, I think that it is fair to say that Harry Potter is not going around with the intent of collecting life debts with young women. It is absolutely inconceivable to me that he would take advantage of your daughter. Please do not give it another thought."

A/N Rated R

Chapter 10

Tonks did not have a great working relationship with Director Bones. Tonks had inevitably been pigeonholed into the surveillance aspect of being an Auror. She really pictured herself more as the investigative sort. Having inherited, or more accurately having been handed a hundred thousand Galleons had also changed her perspective. In fact, she wouldn't have to work again if she didn't want to. She could pursue a career in modeling or any other field if she chose to.

The loss of so many of her co-workers a week ago had served as a gigantic wake up call reminding her of the serious level of danger that her chosen career contained. When Bones had met Tonks in the hallway fifteen minutes earlier and had asked her to stop in her office, Tonks had been surprised.

She knocked on Bones' door and was asked to enter and close the door behind her. Typically that gesture meant that some sort of disciplinary action was about to take place.

"My Grand-niece Susan wrote me and said that Harry's home looks brilliant. The last time that I was there I didn't recall seeing that obnoxious portrait or that disgusting house elf. What happened to them?"

Tonks decided that there was no harm in telling the truth. "Harry had talked the portrait into unsticking itself from the wall. He and Ginny Weasley were carrying it into the other room when Black's old house elf attempted to kill Ginny. She dropped the portrait, and Harry killed the house elf defending her. The portrait was impaled on that disgusting troll leg umbrella stand that they used to have."

"That's gross. How was the house elf killed?"

"Harry used the same flame curse that Dolohov tried to use on Hermione Granger in the Department of Mysteries. The elf was

severed in half. Ginny was really shaken up over him trying to bite her neck off.”

Amelia didn’t know whether to be concerned over his choice of spells or deeply impressed at its execution. “Was she physically hurt?”

“Not a scratch. The entire event probably didn’t take longer than two or three seconds. He has the fastest reflexes of anyone that I have ever met.”

“Susan made the same comment. She had been in his defense club last winter. On a different subject, have you had any sightings of Draco Malfoy?”

“No. I haven’t been able to find him yet.”

“Professor Dumbledore asked that you spend a few days at Grimmauld place. Is that acceptable?”

“Yes Director.”

“Please report back to me when you are done there. I will see you in a few days then. Enjoy your day, Auror Tonks. Thank you.”

While Susan, Ginny, and Hermione were practicing apparation, Tonks had collected Harry and they had taken a portkey to Gringotts. Harry thanked Griphook for taking care of the details of the account transfers that he had requested. As they were walking to the apparation testing station, realization of what Harry had done came to her. Twelve gifts of twenty thousand Galleons each. She poked him and said, “Harry, I don’t know if you know this or not, but a young witch will be able to start Hogwarts this autumn because of your generosity. Her name is Gretta Wood. Her dad Michael was a good man. You did a really good thing Harry. I know that publicity and recognition aren’t your style, but I want you to know that you made the world a better place, and helped right a terrible wrong.” She gently squeezed his arm.

Harry didn't say anything. He was thinking that Voldemort had darkened the lives of another dozen families. They got to the apparation testing room and were shown into the waiting room. The testing clerk picked up the paperwork that Harry had placed in the in-basket and was about to call the applicant's name out loud when she read the name. Looking around at the six witches and wizards in the waiting room, she made eye contact with Harry, who nodded and walked over. She was about Tonks's age and stammered out a greeting. "Good morning sir. My name is Katherine Link. I will be your testing examiner. How long have you been practicing Mr. Potter?"

"Just a day. Please call me Harry. Just Harry." He shook her hand and smiled at her for a moment asking, "What would you like me to do?"

Examiner Link seemed to be more at ease. She started Harry with a close apparation. Harry was so quiet at it that she had to look twice to see that he had moved. Next she asked Harry to apparate to the wall behind the Leaky Cauldron. She went first, and Harry projected himself a few seconds later. She asked Harry to project himself back to the examining room. A second later he appeared next to Tonks with only the tiniest of pops. A few seconds later, Examiner Link appeared next to Harry. She was about to sign his license when she noticed his age. Seeing that she was about to say something, Tonks handed her a small authorization card signed by Minister Diggory himself.

Please extend every courtesy possible to Mr. Harry James Potter. He is authorised all of the privileges and responsibilities of an adult wizard within the British Isles.

Amos Diggory

Amelia Bones

Albus Dumbledore

Tonks took the card back. Harry paid the five Galleon examination fee, and Examiner Link handed Harry his signed Apparation license. He thanked her for her help. On the way out, Harry asked Tonks if

they could go have lunch someplace. Sensing that it was conversation, rather than food that Harry wanted, Tonks took Harry out to a park where they sat on a bench together.

“Wotcher lil bro?”

“I’ve been best friends with Hermione for a long time. I don’t want to throw a spanner in the works there, but she wants it to be more. I fancy Ginny right now and I think she fancies me too. Susan Bones keeps staring at me. Things were simpler when Dudley used to just punch me every day.”

Tonks held Harry’s hand and gave it a squeeze. “Harry you’re a famous wizard. Let’s ignore the fact that you’re talented, rich, kind, gentle, a good kisser, cute, and have that saving people thing. Witches are going to throw themselves at you and over-interpret any act of kindness on your part. Snape couldn’t have gotten eighty pairs of knickers if he’d walked in a Victoria’s Secret shop with a wagonload of hundred pound notes. That’s just the way it is.”

She smiled at Harry, glad that they had righted their relationship. “Let’s leave Susan out of the discussion for a moment. The best thing that you can do with Hermione is to tell her that she means the world to you as your friend, and that you would always be there for her, but right now you are trying to see how things might go with Ginny. I’m certain that she will be hurt for a while, but I believe that she’ll get over it, and long-term you two will be fine.

“I tried to tell her just that, but I think she only heard what she wanted to. Would you talk with her?”

“OK loverboy, but be careful that you aren’t leading them on. The witch in the Examining Department is probably writing in her diary right now saying that you made eyes at her.

“I did no such thing,” Harry started indignantly until he saw that Tonks was playing with him, and then he grinned at her. “Thanks Sis. Thank you very much.”

“No worries. I need to take you back and give you a private lesson about your body. Go home and take a shower. I need to go buy some massage oil and I’ll see you in half an hour. No hanky-panky in the mean time.”

Harry apparated back to the car park. Professor McGonagall was still having the other three go back and forth. He went inside and showered. He got dressed and went into the kitchen to get a butterbeer. Tonks came in carrying a bag that she had just purchased. “Give me five minutes Harry, then meet me in my room.” Harry finished his butterbeer and went up to the room across the hall from his. Tonks had moved all of the furniture to the side and conjured several mirrors and a massage table. “Seal the door Harry,” asked Tonks. “You don’t want someone walking in and getting a very wrong idea.” Harry took out his wand and charmed the door shut. “Harry, do you absolutely trust me?”

Harry looked into her crystal blue eyes, nodded and said, “Yes, I really do.”

“OK. We’re going to examine and explore our bodies. . Please get completely undressed. If you prefer, I will call Dr. Granger in to supervise. I’m not trying to embarrass you, but this is really important if you want to progress with your ability to change your appearance. Harry shook his head. Doctor or not, Hermione’s mum was not going to see him undressed!” Harry did as he was told. Surprisingly Tonks did the same. He looked at Tonks who smiled and said, “Calm down Harry. Teenagers get erections thinking about wallpaper. I would have been disappointed if nothing had happened. Stand here in front of the mirror with me. Take a good look at yourself and take a good look at me. Without any make-up or body changes this is what we really look like. I’m happy with the way that I am and you have every reason to be very happy with the way that you are. Go ahead, and have a look.” Harry carefully looked at Tonks, noticing the details of her face, arms, neck, breasts, her back and her legs.

“OK Harry, stop looking at my bum and watch my legs.” Harry watched as Tonks grew several inches in height, literally stretching her femur and thighs! After a minute, she resized herself.

“OK Harry, Imagine yourself with eyes that are crystal blue like mine. Come on Harry focus on my eyes. You can look at the other bits later. Think of yourself with blue eyes.” And blue eyes they were! Harry looked in the mirror and was shocked to see that his eyes were exactly the color of Tonks. “OK now grow your hair without losing your eye color. With a lot of effort, Harry complied with her request.

“OK Harry, imagine yourself as you really are, and change everything back. A few seconds later, Harry’s eyes were their usual shade of emerald green. “OK Harry, put on your boxers and lay face down on the table.” Tonks put her things back on and got the massage oil out.

She started with his feet, rubbing the oil on his heels, arches, and toes. “Harry, I want you to think of yourself having size twelve feet rather than size ten, think of your toes lengthening slightly.” It was easier to focus on a specific area of his body when she was massaging his toes. She worked upward and got to his arms. “OK Harry, add a little muscle mass to your biceps and triceps.”

Finally she told him to change everything back to normal. “Excellent Harry. You did fantastic! This never would have worked with Professor McGonagall coaching you. I didn’t have anyone to work with. You’re lucky.”

Harry understood the rarity of the lesson that he had just received. “Thanks Sis. I would have been totally embarrassed doing this with anyone else. I really appreciate your help.”

“No problem Harry. For both of our sakes, let’s leave this lesson just between us. It would be difficult to explain to people.”

“I understand. Thanks again.”

“No worries. Go take a shower and get cleaned up for dinner.”

After Dinner they watched a DVD that Harry had brought, Tin Cup. Dan asked, "So what's with all of the golf videos Harry?"

"Nothing really. I own an interest in some old golf course. I'm just trying to learn a little bit about the game. I've never even seen a golf course."

"Remus laughed. "Harry that isn't some old course, it's The old course. It's the hotel at St. Andrews."

Remus' words meant nothing to Harry, but Dan was about ready to bow down at Harry's feet. The conversation may have been fascinating to the men, but Hermione and Ginny were completely indifferent and excused themselves to go upstairs.

Ginny looked around her room. The clean walls looked great and the windows sparkled. The new sheets that Winky put on that morning had never been slept in. Harry had been so good to her. His entire outlook was focused on helping people. He'd never even mentioned setting up the trust fund or sending thousands of Galleons to the families of the men and women that had died protecting Hermione's home. She was so proud of him. Most people wouldn't even consider doing such a thing. Fewer still would do so and not let anyone know who was behind the good deeds.

In the next room, Hermione was having identical thoughts. She realized that she'd been best friends with Harry for nearly a third of her life. He'd saved her family, taken them in, fed, clothed, and protected them just like that. She knew that she wanted the relationship to grow, but realized that Harry would have to be ready. The prophecy could not be ignored. She walked over to Ginny's room and softly knocked on the door. Ginny was brushing her Auburn hair.

"Hi Hermione. Come in."

Hermione sat down on the bed next to her friend. "Hi Ginny. I like your new outfits. They look good on you."

“Thanks. I like yours too. Maybe we can trade them sometimes.”

“OK. So how’s it going with Harry?”

Ginny thought about her answer for a moment. “I don’t know. Tonks was after him for a while. She was trying to get a physical relationship going, but I think something happened, and she got sent away for a while. I wasn’t ready for anything like that. Do you think Harry expects...?”

“No.” I’m sure of it. So is the couch comfortable?”

Ginny turned red. “Did he tell you?”

Hermione smiled at her friend and shook her head. “Not in any detail. Is there anything to tell?”

“No. He never tried anything.” She began brushing Hermione’s shoulder length hair.

“You’re right. I don’t think he would ever take advantage of anyone. Did he talk with you about Umbridge?”

“I was there the night that he had the vision. It was awful. He was shaking and he was so cold.”

Hermione looked slyly at the redhead. “You should have tried the couch.”

Ginny shook her head, slightly embarrassed. “We were all in sleeping bags in the study at the time. There was no furniture. I was so scared for him. Hermione, I’m still so scared for him – all of the things that he has to do.”

Hermione nodded. “I know about the prophecy. He told me the night that we went out for pizza.” She had thought about what they had talked about, re-analyzing every word and gesture that he’d said or given her. She knew that she was deeply in love with him. Sadly she

realized that he needed a best friend right now and not a complex love triangle.

Ginny knew what her best friend was thinking. She knew that Hermione was also in love with Harry, but had too much respect for her to act on it. She leaned over and hugged her friend. "Thanks Hermione. Let's go tuck him in."

On Saturday Harry woke up at 5:30 and decided to use the exercise equipment. After showering, he walked up the stairs to the training room and was surprised to see Hermione, Susan, Emma, Tonks, and Ginny working out at the different stations. Rather than bother them, he quietly turned around and went down to the library to study the Charms book that Professor Flitwick had left for him to read. After an hour he carefully unrolled the manuscript that Professor Dumbledore had given him. Defending against Mind Attacks – Prepared for Mr. Albus Dumbledore by Sir Nicolas Flamel – 1858.

Harry read about the concept of developing a memory palace – An organizational system where different memories are stored in different rooms within the mind. The concept was originally developed in the 1580s by a wizard named Matteo Ricci to help aid in remembering facts and details, but was easily adoptable for use in protecting those same memories and details.

Flamel developed the idea of building shields around the core locations of the mind. The manuscript also provided information on sensing intrusions and finished with techniques for developing false memories.

Harry went back to his room and was surprised to notice two pairs of girl's trainers on either side of his sofa along with two sleeping bags! Thinking it strange that they would be there, he set the shoes in the hallway between Ginny and Hermione's rooms, and went downstairs for breakfast.

Chapter 11

Dumbledore returned to Grimmauld Place late that afternoon. Remus had taken the Doctors out to get some documents signed relating to their house project. Albus climbed the stairs to the training room and a smile crept onto his face. Susan, Hermione, Ginny and Harry were cuddled on the padded floor mats together taking a nap. POP. Dobby appeared with a tray of beverages for everyone. Dumbledore conjured himself a squashy armchair and joined his young friends. Based on the cuts, scrapes and sweaty t-shirts, they must have recently finished quite a training session. Winky appeared and asked what they would like for dinner that evening. Harry said that it was Susan's day to pick. She spent a few minutes conversing with the little elf.

Dumbledore thought about the absurdity of what he was witnessing. - Four teenagers getting up early every day, training and studying 11-12 hours a day on their holiday. He doubted that most of the other students worked that hard during the school term. He asked, "Could you show me your progress?"

Hermione said, "We would be happy to Professor. Shall we try red sparks again? 25 tries for each of us. You can fire them and we will defend. Susan will go first."

One – he missed

Two – he missed

Twenty-five – he missed

"Excellent defense Miss Bones. You may join me.

Hermione successfully evaded both Susan and Dumbledore firing simultaneously. She joined them with Ginny as the target. Though she had several very near misses, Ginny didn't get hit either. "Mr. Potter. It is your turn."

Dodging four people firing sparks took a significant effort. Susan shot sparks high and in front of Harry, Dumbledore low and behind, while

Hermione and Ginny aimed true. After evading them twenty five times, Harry was exhausted and bruised, but untouched.

Dumbledore was both pleased and surprised at the progress that the four had made. "Excellent work, all of you. Defensive work is most important. I am very pleased that each of you managed to escape."

Susan said, "It was the first time today Professor, at least for the three of us. Harry hasn't been hit yet."

"Really? Mr. Potter, what is your hit rate?"

"Typically fifty to seventy percent. The witches are getting a lot quicker. I had started out hitting them almost every time. Susan and Hermione are making exceptional progress. They are a lot more agile than they were. You saw how quick Ginny was."

"Very good. You each deserve a reward. Would you like a night out?"

Susan said, "That would be wonderful Professor, but we'd like to ask for something else instead."

"Certainly. What would you like?"

"We want one day off to go after Malfoy."

'So much for bowling or going to the movies,' thought Dumbledore. "You've obviously discussed this. Tell me your plan."

Harry replied, "Draco helped murder my cousin. He tried to kill Hermione and her parents, and almost certainly helped murder twelve Aurors."

"I agree. Go on."

Harry said, "We have been practicing and want to have a field exercise. Unless Malfoy is staying at the Riddle manor in Little Hangleton, we should be able to get him alone."

Dumbledore frowned. This was not what he wanted at this time, but they looked determined. "I hesitate to be a part of this. I sincerely doubt that Miss Weasley's or Miss Granger's parents would allow them to participate in such an activity were they to ask them. However this is a distraction that you four seem to be very focused on. I do admit that it would provide you with a different level of practice than sending sparks."

"There is every reason to believe that Draco Malfoy has followed in his father's footsteps and become a killer for a terrible cause. You wouldn't be playing for a silver cup or house points, rather your lives. That is not my decision to make for you. Men and women younger than you have joined in battles for centuries. Is this really what you want?"

Hermione said, "No one wants this Professor, you the least. The fact of the matter is that we are already in it. We will need some help Professor."

Dumbledore considered his words for a moment. "If on a hypothetical training basis, you were to consider such a plan what would you need?"

Harry replied, "We would want two sets of anti apparition manacles, a portkey each, my cell phone, my invisibility cloak, and an extra cloak if possible."

Dumbledore was secretly delighted that they were even considering such a plan. However Draco had not been seen at Malfoy manor since Tonks was assigned to keep surveillance on him. "Where would you expect to find him? He hasn't been seen in two weeks."

Ginny turned slightly redder than usual. "Professor, weren't you ever sixteen? He'd turn up at Pansy's house for some..."

"Chinese food and companionship. I admit that courting rituals were slightly different in the 1860s than today, but I understand what you are alluding to." Harry and Hermione looked at each other and started sniggering. A moment later, all four of them were laughing uncontrollably.

Dumbledore let them have their moment at his expense. “So if the four of you happened to be going out for pizza a week from Friday, and happened to be by Miss Parkinson’s and happened to come across Mr. Malfoy, who happened to be alone at the time, what would you do?”

“We’d stun him and quickly portkey him away.”

“And if you were seen and captured?”

“We use the emergency portkey to come back here.”

“If you were hurt?”

“We’d portkey back here and apply first aid. Ideally we could have Madam Pomfrey waiting just in case.”

“If Mr. Malfoy was not alone?”

“We’d terminate the mission and try it another time.”

Hermione was getting frustrated. This was the first time that she and Harry had planned an adventure and bothered to tell Dumbledore about it in advance. Was he being a road block, or simply exercising a prudent level of caution? Recalling a conversation from several years ago she said, “Professor, we know the law. We must not be seen. She looked into his blue eyes as they softened, then twinkled.

“Yes you do, Miss Granger. Let’s plan on a week from Friday. In the mean time you should work on stunning and dodging.”

Winky popped in and said that dinner would be ready in thirty minutes. Susan, Hermione and Ginny left to shower and get out of their sweaty outfits. Dumbledore asked Harry to stay for a few extra minutes. They discussed the training that they were doing and the legality of a capture. Dumbledore said that he would ask Kingsley to come over the next evening and demonstrate. Harry invited Albus to stay for dinner, but he declined, saying that he was having dinner with Anna Daily. Remus arrived with the Grangers and Albus took his leave.

Dinner was quite lively that evening. Dan and Emma had been back to their lot and construction on their new home would begin next week. Dan commented that they'd had Chinese for lunch. Ginny made eye contact with Harry, then Susan, and began laughing uncontrollably. Dan asked what was so funny – saying that they had Chinese at noon all the time. Hermione spilled her butterbeer and left the table to get a dishtowel, to avoid further embarrassing herself in front of her parents.

Ginny knocked about 11 PM, and let herself in Harry's room. Harry was sleeping on the couch, with at least three books opened. She tucked him in, stacked his books neatly off to the side and carefully removed his glasses, setting them on the nightstand. Illuminated by the fire in front of the couch he looked so peaceful. She leaned over and kissed his nose. Ginny whispered, "I love you Harry Potter."

Harry murmured, "I love you Ginny." He was having the most pleasant dream.

Ginny unrolled the sleeping bag that she had placed under his bed and placed it in front of the couch where Harry was sleeping. Comforted by the steady sound of his breathing, she immediately fell asleep.

Kingsley came over after breakfast. He demonstrated different stunning techniques and ways of subduing an opponent with and without magic. He showed the teens how to set up a parameter, and basic ambush techniques. After they had practiced a while, he took them over to the park. As the weather was cloudy and lightly raining, it was deserted. He handed each of them a tennis ball and cast a disillusionment charm on each of them. He told them to hide and that he would be walking up to the tree by the brook in five minutes. If he reached the tree without getting hit by a tennis ball, or he hit any of them, they would have to run laps around the park for the rest of the morning. If they were successful, they could direct the next lesson.

He walked back to the house and had a cup of tea for twenty minutes. Figuring that the teens had given up by then, he walked back to the park. He didn't immediately see any of the teens. Carefully looking, he saw movement in one of the bushes near the tree. Carefully walking up to it he threw a tennis ball at the bush. He realized that he had hit a cocker spaniel by mistake. Retrieving his tennis ball, Kingsley was hit by three tennis balls. Turning around to see the witches, he was pelted by the fourth ball, from Harry who had been standing stone still by the dog.

Kingsley was pleased, but a bit embarrassed. Granted the weather was very cloudy, and it was raining lightly, but he'd just been beaten by four teenagers. Refusing Harry's offer to come in for tea and biscuits, he said that he would be back at the same time the next day to show them how to use the anti-apparation manacles.

They had reading that afternoon. Professor Flitwick had given them texts on basic conjuring. While not strictly a fighting spell like some of the blocks, curses and Jinxes that they had been taught, being able to create an abject at the moment of need would be a great asset.

That evening, Remus took them back to the park for some lessons on stealth. He showed the how to step silently, and use their hearing to tune in to specific sounds or conversations within a mass of background noise.

Harry was convinced that between the disillusionment charm and the tactics that Remus had shown them, they could approach Pansy's house and create an effective ambush for Malfoy.

It had been several years since Dumbledore needed to find several Instructors at the same time. It occurred to him that the Instructors that he would be interviewing as well as most of the current staff would be at the castle after he was gone. Albus had no intention of living his last days at the castle. He hoped to purchase an automobile and travel through the American southwest in a year. Dumbledore

decided to break his habit and ask the heads of houses if they had any Instructor Candidates in mind.

On Saturday he found Professors Flitwick, Sprout, and McGonagall seated at the round table in the sunroom that they used during the holiday. The windows gave the room a nice view and a bright atmosphere. As he walked in he found Professor Flitwick making a vain attempt to interest the two witches in his story of wiring Harry's home – Tales of selecting the proper circuit box, placement of the outlets and switches while fascinating to him were rapidly putting his two colleagues to sleep. When Minerva commented on how bright the home seemed in the evening, Flitwick beamed.

Albus let them finish then got to the business at hand. He was looking for Instructors who knew their topic, related well with students, and exhibited above average knowledge transfer skills. In other words he wanted Instructors who could effectively teach their topic without intimidating the students. It was 20 July. He would have to extend the contract offers in the next two weeks.

Flitwick suggested that he consider Anna Daily for the Potions Instructor. While never having taken the time to certify as a Potions Master, she clearly knew her topic and served as a substitute several years ago. Currently working at St. Mungo's research center, her most significant contribution had been the development of the Wolfsbane potion. Originally from Melbourne, there would be the avoidance of the discussion that she had grown up in one of the other houses. The other candidates discussed eventually fell away as second tier choices – due to lack of perceived teaching skills, previous infractions at the Ministry, or other reasons.

Finally the subject came around to the annual search for a suitable Defense Instructor. They hadn't had an Instructor that had lasted an entire term since Quirrell. Again Dumbledore asked for candidates. Sprout laughed and said, "Albus the answer is obvious. You need to find a twenty year old Harry Potter."

Dumbledore smiled at his earthy friend. "I know. I simply wish that he existed."

Sprout asked, "How is he getting along?"

Minerva answered, "He is spending the holiday training at Hit Wizard level!"

Dumbledore added, "Harry is indeed improving his personal skills. His own needs are not a perfect match with our standard curriculums. He wishes to improve his fighting skills, learn transfiguration, charms and conjuring and legilimency well beyond NEWT level, as well as acquire a practical knowledge of healing. He should also learn about estate management, as he will acquire control of several large trusts in a few years.

Sprout asked, "What are you suggesting?"

"Harry is currently considering several options – Private tutors, or becoming a Wizard's Apprentice. In either event, I don't think that we can accommodate his needs as well as ask him to teach on a full-time basis. Perhaps he could be talked into continuing with his evening group."

Minerva asked, "What did you have in mind if he elects the Apprentice route?"

A physical conditioning program

Advanced conjuring

Advanced charms

Advanced transfiguration

Possibly potions later on

Battlefield healing

Stealth

Advanced fighting skills

Business management

Leadership skills

“What of Miss Granger, Weasley, and Bones?”

“Albus looked at Minerva closely before answering. “I don’t know if they would be interested in similar programs, or if in Miss Bones’ case, if she could afford it.”

“I would volunteer several evenings a week if it would help,” said Flitwick. Sprout and McGonagall quickly joined in.

“You don’t need to volunteer. It may be better for everyone if the lessons were viewed as paid tutoring so there is no appearance of favoritism. Mr. Potter is also investigating the use of full-time tutors. It would be best if he makes his mind up this week regarding their use. Back to topic, I am considering approaching Director Bones regarding her loaning us Hestia Jones for a term. Perhaps we can talk to Mr. Potter next year.” He thanked them for their input and wished them each a good day.

“Absolutely not. Dumbledore,” said Amelia. Three weeks ago, I would have agreed in a blink, but we have so few Aurors now that losing another would be a hardship for the others. We have a three year training program that we are trying to compress into one year. What about Moody?”

Dumbledore had considered his old friend. “I’m certain that he would do well with the older students, but I believe that the younger students may be a bit intimidated by him.”

“Amelia asked the obvious question. “What about a part-time student teacher?”

Dumbledore’s silver mustache quivered with laughter. “That option keeps coming up. I will have to consider it.” On another subject,

would it be possible for me to talk with Peter Pettigrew for a few minutes?”

“Of course. Are you planning on using Veritaserum?”

“No Legilimency. He can be interrogated later in the day if you wish.

We can go now. I will accompany you. They walked down to the holding cells. Pettigrew was in a cell he himself watched 24 hours a day by two Aurors.

Dumbledore sat in front of Pettigrew and started searching the edges of his memories – Being recruited by Malfoy, becoming secret keeper for the Potters, Lilly casting the spell, being found by an eleven year old Percy Weasley, evading Crookshanks, being confronted by Sirius and Remus, Voldemort’s rebirth, various meeting with different Death Eaters, the evening preceding the attack on the Dursleys – Draco, Umbridge and two assassins Dumbledore tried to find a recollection of the evening prior to the attack at the Granger home. Apparently Pettigrew had not been there.

After five minutes he left the holding cell, leaving Pettigrew and his watchers in peace. Dumbledore told Bones to question Pettigrew regarding the Potters, Black, the attack on the Dursleys and the murder of Cedric Diggory.

Harry and the teens found Remus in the cellar of the house. They told him of their plan to snatch Malfoy the next week and asked him if he could help them get some lightweight basic body armor. Remus suggested that they invest in Dragonhide vests that would be worn inside a shirt. They would absorb most jinxes.

“What about the muggle body armor that the police wear?”

“What are you trying to stop?”

“A killing curse or the Cruciatus curse. They’re playing for keeps. I reckon that we might as well recognize that and be as prepared as we can.”

Remus said that he would quietly investigate the options and get back to Harry in a day or so. Harry told him that he wanted the best available, and cost was not a consideration.

Saturday night Harry asked Ginny if she wanted to go out and have dinner with him. She immediately agreed. Tonks walked with them as they walked down the three streets to the restaurants. Next to the Pizza hut was an Asian restaurant that they decided to try. Tonks ate a few tables over from them, wishing that they wouldn’t exclude her, but understood that even in a large home like Harry’s a few minutes of privacy was precious. She had shown Harry how to cast a silencing charm around their booth to use after their food had come.

They had fun fumbling with the sticks and making faces at each other. Half way into the meal Ginny asked, “Harry, would you be my boyfriend?”

“Of course. Would you be my girlfriend?”

“Of course. Harry, a lot of other girls keep chasing you. If you want to, I’d let you...”

“Stop. Ginny I don’t care who is chasing me, and I can’t ward the house against owls delivering knickers. I can’t stop witches from waving their bits in my face. I don’t encourage it, and I don’t react to it. I can only think of one young lady that I’m interested in. She has pretty eyes, warm lips, and always thinks of others. I’m proud to know her.”

“Why thank you Mr. Potter.” She was desperately relieved.

“Ginny, we’re not old enough or anywhere near ready to make love. Don’t worry about that. I’d never ask you to do anything that wouldn’t be right. I really like your company. I like when we sleep by each

other. I like cuddling up on the couch with you. I love when you sing your little songs and you don't think anyone is listening. You're fun to be with, and you have a nasty wicked streak in you that I love to see come out every once in a while. I'm proud to be your boyfriend."

He continued. "I worry about you being publicly linked to me. I don't want you or your family to get hurt because of me. So we'll need to be careful there. Tonks has been helping me with that morph thing, and I should be able to disguise myself pretty well when we go out."

"Nice. So do I get to help you practice?" Ginny had a wicked gleam in her eye

Harry choked on his hot and sour soup and started coughing. "I'm sorry. Strong soup."

"I said I'd help you practice if you want. Tonks told me that it would help if you had someone to practice with."

"I'd like that thanks."

"We should probably get back. She's been done a while now. Thanks for a nice dinner Harry."

On the way back Tonks poked Harry and said, "You really choked on your soup Harry. Most people set their chopsticks down and use the spoon."

"Very funny. Ginny offered to help me practice morphing."

A smile flashed on her face, and her crystal blue eyes sparkled. "That's a fabulous idea! I'll give her some pointers to help you with. We should have thought of that earlier. I bet Ginny would be good at helping you. Good night you two."

"Thanks Tonks. Goodnight."

Chapter 12 (21 July)

Sunday morning Flitwick continued his lesson on conjuring items. "You're attempting to shape mass out of the basic elements, water, earth, or air. From that perspective it's a variation on transfiguration. Depending on your skill level, the objects that you create can last a day or two or last a long time.

Harry asked, "Professor, we have a specific interest in being able to conjure a limestone, marble, or granite object. Would it be possible to use that as an example?"

"What dimension did you have in mind Mr. Potter?"

"I'm not certain sir. In our last transfiguration lesson, we were discussing physical blocks against the killing curse."

"We haven't tested how thick of a slab that we would need, but I was thinking of something along the lines of a gladiator shield. Obviously weight would also be a factor."

Flitwick thought about what they were thinking of. Personally he thought agility would be compromised too much at the expense of armor, but the idea was certainly worth investigating. He told them, "You four have been giving this matter a lot of thought. I will do some testing and have some samples tomorrow. In the mean time, is there another item that you wish to work on?"

Susan replied, "How about a sleeping bag professor? Harry seems to get extra house guests from time to time and could use them."

"Very well then. Please visualize the sleeping bag that you are trying to create. Think of the little details. Close your eyes if you want, picture the item and say Conjurous."

Susan made a squashy black sleeping bag. Ginny's was emerald green and extra squashy. Hermione's was very similar to Susan's except not as thick. Harry's was purple, squashy, and looked like it could fit two people. He got a few sideways glances from Hermione

and Susan, but everyone was pleased that their incantation had worked.

Flitwick continued. "Excellent. Next try for a food item. Think of an apple or something that you like to eat." Hermione created an orange. "Excellent work Miss Granger. Susan created a bunch of grapes. "Very good work, Miss Bones." Ginny created a chocolate chip cookie. "Delightful Miss Weasley." Harry made a thin crust cheese pizza cooked just right. "Outstanding, Mr. Potter."

He continued with the lesson. Finally, I'd like you to make a mug, a drinking glass, or a teacup that you remember. Picture the details carefully and we will put them away to see how long that they'll last. Please place them on the table when you are satisfied with them. I will check on the marble shield idea and see if it might make sense. Enjoy your evenings. I will see you tomorrow."

After the lesson Hermione stayed behind. She spent several hours conjuring a place setting of the china that her Grandmother had given her parents as a wedding gift. Then she carefully made a second and third set. She asked Winky to make her and her parents a simple lunch that they could eat together.

True to his word Kingsley came over the next morning. He and Tonks demonstrated the use of the anti-apparation manacles. Susan had apparently seen them earlier, because she could get them on someone the quickest. Kingsley asked them if they assumed that the person who would be restrained would be unconscious or struggling. He pointed out that if they were struggling and attached with one arm, it would still be possible to portkey them, as the manacles worked the same as if the prisoner was holding the portkey them self.

They had a lot of difficulty against Kingsley. He outweighed any of them by three or four stone, was quite a bit stronger than any of them, and knew unarmed combat. Harry was quite bruised by the end of the session, as much as anything, from Hermione trying to stun Kingsley, and hitting Harry by mistake.

The only problem with using the manacles was that once closed, they could not be reopened in the field. Thus if they closed around the wrong person, it would require that they used a portkey to get back to the Ministry holding cell to get let out. The manacles would not close unless something was within them, meaning that they could not be accidentally be closed if someone's arm or ankle wasn't being held.

Kingsley left three pairs for their use. One was a red practice pair that would reopen with the tap of any of their wands. The other two were real. Kingsley told them that they had been checked out to Tonks, who was responsible for their return within thirty days.

By the end of the lesson, they were all bruised from taking their turn at being the bad guy. Harry carefully put the three sets of manacles away in his trunk, and thanks Kingsley and Tonks for their help and trust.

That afternoon Susan found Harry reading at one of the tables in the library. "Hi Harry, can we visit for a few minutes."

"Of course. Can I get you a butterbeer?" Pop. Winky appeared with a tray of butterbeers and cokes. Susan took a coke. Harry took a butterbeer. They both smiled at her. She had a miniature school girl dress on, and looked very cute.

"Harry, I want to thank you for inviting me into your home this summer."

"You don't need to say anything. I enjoy your company, and I'm happy to have you here."

"Harry, it's more than that. You have been trying to make Britain a safer place for as long as I've known you. I know that I'm not as brave as you. I'd never win a special award for services to the school or get sixty points for sheer nerve like you did, but I still want to help. Professor Sprout is a nice lady, but she'd never dream of showing us how to fight, or defend ourselves properly. You have a leadership quality that none of the professors except maybe Professor

Dumbledore have. I know Auntie made you take me in, but I just wanted to say thanks.”

Harry cut her off. “Susan, stop it! No one made me do anything. I invited you here of my own free will. The sorting hat keeps saying that the different houses have to work together. I think it’s happening. Flitwick is helping us, McGonagall is helping us. Tonks is helping us. I’m sure that Professor Sprout would help us in any way that we asked her to. This isn’t Gryffindor vs. Slytherin. It is all good people trying to take a stand against killers and thugs.”

“Thanks Harry. Most people don’t pay any attention to the Hufflepuffs. You see people for what they really are. I just wanted to say thanks.”

“No problem. How is your occlumency training going?”

“Slowly. I don’t have anyone to practice with.”

“I could help a bit if you’d like. I’ve been working on it for nearly a year.”

“Thanks. What can I do to help with the Malfoy operation?”

“Susan, you’re really good at conjuring and healing. Someone might get hurt and really need your help.”

“Auntie had me take the witches first aid class last summer. I passed the class.”

“That’s great! I didn’t even know that there was such a class. I’d like to get to the point where we could stun him, put on the manacles and get away in less than ten seconds. Every second that we stay there exposed increases the risk that bad things might happen. We need someone that we can depend on to help us, and I know that person is you. We also need some photos of the home and the grounds. I’ll ask Tonks if she could help us there.”

Harry continued. Susan, my point is that there will be lot’s of tasks to do, and I know that you will be a lot of help. Professor Dumbledore will get us an address. I don’t know if she lives in a muggle

neighborhood, or in some big country manor. We don't know if we will have to be inside their house, or could get him from outside. I don't know if they are connected to the floo network, or if they have anti-apparation wards set up everywhere. We have a busy week ahead of us."

"Thanks Harry. You're really a great guy."

"Susan, you're a very good witch. I'm really glad you're here."

After the defense training session the next day, Remus took the women out to run errands. Dumbledore asked Harry to visit with him in the library.

"I wanted to talk with you about several things Harry. I checked the school records. The Parkinsons live in Yorkshire County. Here is their address. Here are some portkeys. They will activate if you hold them and say Chinese food. I asked Remus to check out the area last night. He will be able to give you some details. One of my trustworthy former students is quietly checking to see if they are hooked up to the floo network. Tonks will take some photos of the area tomorrow that may help."

"It is likely that the Parkinson home itself is warded against apparition. As such it is most likely that Draco would apparate either to the front or back entrance and go in. They do not have a large home, but you would need two groups, one to watch the front, the other to watch the back. You saw with your own practice that it is much easier to dodge two attackers than three. As such, I recommend that you consider asking two people for assistance. I'm positive that Tonks and Remus would offer to assist you in any way that you would request. Her presence does not make this a ministry sanctioned capture. It is an illegal kidnapping. You must not be seen. Once Draco has been stunned and portkeyed back to your car park, he will be transported to the ministry holding cells for interrogation. I have little doubt of his guilt, and hold to my warning that I believe him to be a killer, but he is to be considered innocent until proven guilty."

“Harry, have you thought any more about your longer-term skills training?”

In truth, Harry had been thinking of little else for the last few days. He replied, “I don’t think sixth year classes would fit my needs, so I’ve eliminated going back to Hogwarts as a student as an option. I have some hesitation about staying here and hiring tutors that I don’t know, so I have two options that I’m considering – asking you to tutor me full time, or asking you about an apprentice program of some sort. Before you answer, let me give you my reasoning. First and foremost I trust you. Second, I know that we have had our differences, and we most likely will again in the future, but I know that you care about me. Third, despite our differences, I think we have a common goal.”

He continued, “Sirius’s concern was that you wouldn’t have enough extra time to be able to devote to my training. Sir, I can’t answer that for you. I have some other reasons, and I’d like to give them to you. I’m not trying to sound fatalistic but I may not live to be eighteen. For the first time in my life, someone that I like has asked to be my girlfriend. I don’t want to enroll in some evil wizarding fighting school in Tasmania and leave everyone that I know. I honestly don’t know that Remus is going to be able to show me what I need. I don’t want to learn a hundred different assassination techniques. I want to master one that will work.”

He concluded, “This is where my thinking comes back to you. You somehow beat Grindelwald in 1945. You taught Tom Riddle as a student and know some things about him, and you’ve had fifteen years to think about getting rid of him.”

Dumbledore had listened carefully to Harry’s words, and was pleased at his reasoning. “Harry, I don’t believe that I have shared this with you before. I was in my late nineties when I faced Grindelwald. In the end I shot him eight times with a pistol. There was no fancy spell work, just violence.”

“Yes, I will help you bring down Tom Riddle, but in the end you will be the one facing him. I would like to take you on as my Apprentice. If you are certain of the relationship, I will offer the same to Miss

Weasley. I will tutor you both myself several hours a day. Minerva, Poppy, and Filius have offered to tutor you as well.”

Harry had thought about the next part of the conversation very carefully. He asked, “Professor should they be willing, would you consider offering the same to Hermione and Susan?”

“I would offer them the same opportunity should you ask me to, but expect that the Grangers would decline for their daughter. I believe that it would be out of hope and loyalty that Hermione would accept, not career conviction. As for Susan, I believe that she would be best suited to apprenticing with Poppy or pursuing a Healing certificate through traditional means.”

“I’m not disagreeing with you professor, but shouldn’t we let them decide for themselves? As for Hermione and Susan, yes they are loyal. I believe that they both are exceptionally loyal. Someday I will have to face Voldemort. Would it be so bad to have others there with me?” Hermione has always stood by me since we were eleven. I don’t feel the same way about her that I do with Ginny, but there’s no doubt in my mind that she’s my best friend. Ron has abandoned me more times than I care to remember.”

“Harry, Generals have led loyal troops into battle for centuries. You are not wrong to inspire loyalty. Please be certain that you provide them the training and tools that they deserve. In a war like this, a general’s job is to get some level of result with no loss of one’s own. It was a mistake to get into a set piece battle with Voldemort at the Grangers. You are right to try to pick away at his followers one by one.”

Tonks and Remus sat at the table in the library listening carefully to Harry’s plan. They had diagramed the area based on the photos that Tonks had taken and the surveillance that Remus had done. Tonks asked, “Harry, what time do you think he might appear?”

“I expect sometime in the afternoon or early evening.”

“Then you’d better plan on getting there in the mid morning. The hardest part of an ambush is the waiting. You need to stay alert, and remain silent and unseen. Otherwise, you become the target.”

Harry looked into her crystal blue eyes. “Since we don’t know if he would be coming to the front of the house, or the rear, I was hoping that you and Remus would join us. I’d feel better with a three-person team than just two people. The other could serve as backup for the team that sees him first.”

Tonks glanced at Remus for a fraction of a second. He nodded and said, “We had always intended to help you. That said, “Here are the dragon hide vests that we talked about. We had them made a few days ago.

“I will pass them out after dinner. Only a few of the Aurors have ones as good.”

Harry examined the vest that Remus handed him. “Hungarian Horntail.”

“They’re as much protection as you can get. They’ll deflect most curses except the unforgivables. They’d slow down a bullet from a muggle pistol too. Let’s hope that you never have the opportunity to find out.” He carefully examined each of the vests.

Tonks said, “Eventually they’ll go next to your skin, but wear them over a t-shirt for a day or two until they get comfortable. I’ll help the women with theirs.” Glancing at Harry she asked, “How’s your other practice going?”

Knowing that she was referring to Metamorphmagus practice, Harry said, “Not much has changed. I need more time to work on it.”

Remus only caught half of the conversation, “What practice?”

“His disguise. The stealth training that you taught him is dead useful. I’d be happy to get a lesson from you myself, but he has to be able to get out once in a while with Ginny without being noticed.”

“Getting back to task how do you want to make up the teams?”

“We’ll have Ginny, Tonks, Hermione on one team and the rest of us on the other.”

Wednesday, they spent a good part of the day practicing stunning and manacling each other. Everyone was sore both from falling, but also from the new vests. They took turns giving each other a massage after the practice. Tonks did Ginny who did Susan who did Hermione who did Harry who did Tonks. Remus had been gone most of the day acquiring an extra invisibility cloak.

Thursday they practiced hitting moving targets. Harry opened several of the windows and they each conjured twenty red balloons. They practiced sparking the balloons as they drifted in the breeze. It was a lot harder to hit a smaller moving target than a larger stationary one. Finally Tonks and Remus conjured 150 grapefruit sized balloons and created a breeze. There were six colors. When they had finished making the balloons, everyone was assigned a color and they started hitting their color at the same time. It really was quite difficult identifying your own color, taking aim and trying to hit it, rather than one of the other colors. Harry, Remus and Tonks became quite competitive and tied for first. Ginny and Susan finished about ten seconds later. Hermione was a bit more methodical and finished a few seconds later.

They had prepared about as much as they could, and felt ready. At dinner, Tonks mentioned that they would be out on a field trip the next day, and asked the Grangers if they would need anything the next day. Remus said that he would take his cellular telephone and call if they would be late for dinner.

Ginny came in at ten and closed the door behind her. As usual, Harry was sitting on the floor staring at the fire. “Hi Harry. What are you looking at?”

"I was just thinking of the first time that I stared into the fireplace and saw Sirius. He had popped into the Gryffindor common room fireplace. It was during my fourth year. He had broken into some wizard's house to use their fireplace so he could talk to me about the Tri-wizard tournament." Ginny scooted up behind Harry on the floor and put her arms around him. They sat in comfortable silence. Ginny started massaging Harry's shoulders, which he obviously enjoyed. After five minutes Harry scooted Ginny in front of him, trading places with her. He began massaging her shoulders. She felt so good being by him. "Ginny, promise me that you'll be careful tomorrow. If we get Malfoy tomorrow, that's great, but nothing is worth your getting hurt."

"I'll be careful Harry." I know that your will too." It was then that Harry noticed that Ginny had somehow neglected to button her nightshirt properly. "We're both tired. Let's get on the couch and get some rest." The rest of the evening was quite comforting indeed.

The Parkinson house was not large, but it was very nice. The back garden was quiet. The front was on the inward side of a road near the ocean. Because the back was so much more secluded, Tonks was certain that Draco would apparate or portkey to the back garden. The house had been disconnected from the floo network the previous week citing problems with the connection in that area.

To verify that she was home, Dumbledore arranged to have her OWL results sent late that morning with instructions that she needed to identify the classes that she would be taking by return owl. The owl would arrive fifteen minutes after they had gotten into position.

At ten the six of them took the portkey to the neighboring home. Harry, Susan and Remus took the back garden and found an area where they had good sightline to the back door, but also had sightline to the other team who was similarly stationed in the front. They conjured rocks that they could sit on and remained covered. The plan was that they would see Malfoy appear, Harry would stun him with the other two providing cover. Remus would apply the manacles, and Susan

would carry back the big invisibility cloak. She carried Remus' cell phone which had been turned off so that it wouldn't inadvertently give their position away. In an emergency they could use it to call for backup. The front team had made similar arrangements except with Tonks on lead. In the event that one team went onto action, the other was to come to their assistance. Each of them had been disillusioned, so even when they took the cloak off, they would be difficult to see.

Ten minutes after they got into position, the school owl arrived and tapped on the back window. Pansy came out to get the owl. Hermione noticed that she was wearing makeup, and had obviously been working on her long brown hair.

The minutes passed slowly and nothing happened. The hours passed even slower. Twelve o'clock. One o'clock. Two o'clock. Susan gave them each one of the plastic bottled waters that she had brought. Three o'clock. The rocks were the most uncomfortable objects ever created. Four o'clock.

Then Malfoy appeared. Susan took off the cloak that had been covering the three of them. They all stood. Harry took careful aim and said "Stupify" a second later he cast it again. The others came running to that side of the house. Remus sprinted up to Malfoy and placed the manacles on one of his wrists then the other. A second later he vanished. Harry gave the signal for the second team to use their portkeys and they vanished. As he was going back to Susan, the back door opened, and a jet of red light was fired at Harry. It missed, but hit Susan instead and she fell. Harry ran the last half dozen steps to her, grabbed the cloak, Susan's arm and holding the portkey said "Chinese food."

A second later, they were all in the car park. Tonks stunned Malfoy again and transported him to the holding cells. Remus helped Harry with Susan. Fortunately she had only been stunned. The spell had hit her in the forehead, and left a red mark like a burn.

Poppy who had been waiting inside, saw them return and rushed out to help. She looked at Susan for a moment, and said "Enervate." A few seconds later, Susan's eyes opened. She asked Remus and Harry to help her inside. They got her into her room. Poppy gave her

a potion to make her feel better, and heal the red mark on her head. Ginny and Hermione brought in the cloaks, and the knapsacks that they had brought with them.

Fifteen minutes later, Susan felt much better. She got up, and found Harry. She gave him a kiss and a big hug. She whispered "Thanks Harry. You saved me."

The five of them then celebrated their success with a special dinner of pizza, salad, cokes and butterbeers. They had done it!!!

An hour later, the Grangers got back along with Professor Dumbledore. They had been out looking at the construction project, and had stopped for dinner. Dumbledore asked, "Where is Miss Tonks?"

Remus answered, "She is interviewing a prisoner. We decided to conjure pizza. Can we offer you a slice?"

Dumbledore picked up a slice, and said "It looks like you've made excellent progress with your studies. Let's go in the library and you can tell me all about it."

Chapter 13

The anger in Amelia's voice could not be mistaken. "Dumbledore, how dare you? They could have been killed. You had no right to put them in a situation where they could have been killed, captured, or worse. What were you thinking sending them after a killer? How in the world did they find him anyway? What if they had ran into a gang of those killers? I made a promise to myself that I would watch out for Susan after her parents were murdered."

Dumbledore replied, "The fact of the matter is that they conceived the idea, thought of the contingencies, developed a plan and successfully executed it. You knew what Harry was training to do when you requested that Susan be allowed to join in. Within the confines of his knowledge of spells, Harry is training at or above Hit Wizard level. Ten days ago they came to me with their plan and correctly identified where Malfoy could safely be captured. They rehearsed, set up the ambush, acquired some experience, and put a suspected killer into your able custody. Harry is currently at a decision point, considering educational options including an apprenticeship. He specifically inquired if I would consider extending the same opportunity to your Grand-niece. Naturally I wanted to get your approval before making such an offer. Depending on your perspective, the skills that she learns might put her in more danger, or allow her to ably defend herself. Irrespective of her choice, these are very dangerous times."

For the moment, Bones' frustration with Dumbledore has placed on hold. Sensing that, he continued, "On a different subject of equal importance and more urgency, has Malfoy been interrogated?"

"No, shall we?"

"I would like to talk with him for ten minutes, the results of which may provide you with some avenues for different questions that you may want answers to."

"Be my guest."

They walked down the different levels to the holding cells area that was not far from the courtrooms. The holding cells were currently

nearly full as the prisoners from the Ministry of Magic raid had yet to be tried. They were being held indefinitely. The cells were structured so one prisoner could not see or communicate with another. Draco had been strip searched, and was wearing the Mark on the underside of his left forearm. Currently he was sitting on the cement ledge that also served as a bed wearing only his underpants. The only other object in the room was a two pound coffee tin that served as his stool. Dumbledore initially sat in the interview room, but decided to interview Draco in his cell instead. Kingsley who was reassigned with duty that morning opened the cell door. Amelia sat outside, while Kingsley held his wand on Malfoy to stun him in the event that he moved. Not that such a move was likely. Draco's ankle was attached to the wall with a foot long cable similar to a bicycle lock. Basically he couldn't move.

Dumbledore walked into the cell and conjured himself a small comfortable blue stool to sit on.

"Good morning, Draco. I'm going to ask you a few questions. The answers that you provide will impact your living conditions in the immediate future."

It had not yet occurred to the blond hair young man that he would probably never again walk outside as a free man again. "I don't have to answer your questions Professor."

"That remains to be seen. In the meanwhile, you are the one tethered to a wall wearing your underpants."

Even Draco had to admit that there was little pride in wearing two-day-old underpants. "What do you want to know?"

"How is it that you came to be here?" Dumbledore really wasn't concerned with the answer. He just wanted to get Malfoy talking, so he could begin a mind probe. As Malfoy began his "story" that he had been invited over to the Parkinsons to discuss school matters, Dumbledore began his mind probe. Images of Draco as a Death Eater gushed out. Being initiated last Christmas, his raids, recruiting Crabbe, Goyle, Bulstrode, Flint, Warrington, and Edgecombe. Attempting to recruit Parkinson and Zabini. Passing information onto

Snape, plotting and executing the murder of the Dursleys, attending meetings, setting the fires the night at the Grangers. Other images appeared - Malfoy and his crew laughing at Harry and Neville repeatedly being verbally abused by Snape in his classroom. Malfoy manor with its secret rooms and deadly objects. Plans to raid different high profile light side students. Meetings with Delores, Umbridge abusing Harry. Dumbledore'd had enough. Malfoy was still drawling on about the injustice of being picked up without cause. Dumbledore got up and vanished the comfortable stool.

"Thank you Draco. You will likely find that the holding cells here will be your best accommodations for many years to come. I will have your OWL results sent here. Do enjoy your day."

He left the cell and the three of them walked back up the stairs to Amelia's comfortable office. Sipping a cocoa, Dumbledore told them what they he had seen, leaving out the part about Marietta and Malfoy Manor. Draco would be interrogated under Veritaserum relating to the murders of the Dursleys and the seven Aurors who were in the Granger house. The Wizengamot ordered fines would go a long way to emptying the family vault. Dumbledore had other business to attend to and the meeting ended.

Amelia thought about what had happened. Tonks showed up yesterday afternoon in the holding cell at 4:30 with Malfoy who was still stunned. Dumbledore had made a few points. Harry had been out on a training mission. Her own Auror program wasn't too different, except such a raid would have taken place in second year, and the suspect would usually be someone up for minor offense such as illegal enchantment of a muggle object. While she had little doubt that Tonks had provided the anti-apparation manacles, she had little doubt that Potter had planned the capture. She made up her mind, gathered up the necessary things and apparated off to Grimmauld place.

She was greeted at the door by Dobby. Walking in, she saw the four upstairs learning how to conjure thin slabs of marble. Rather than immediately disrupt the lesson, she decided to watch. The students

had each conjured a different width stone and had moved behind Flitwick. He began casting the killing curse at the stones, several of which shattered. She'd seen enough. "Professor Flitwick. What are you doing? Teaching students the unforgivable curses is specifically prohibited under the section for disbursement of illegal charms, section two."

"Auntie, wait. He wasn't teaching us the killing curse, he was showing us how thick of a marble shield that we would need to cast if we were being attacked." The other students nodded in agreement.

Red-faced, she said, "I apologize Professor. I spoke out of turn. Why marble?"

Tiny Flitwick walked over to her with his hand out for her. "Hello Director Bones. We were conjuring marble shields because Mr. Potter had related his encounters with the Death Eaters casting the killing curses at him, and having the curses blocked by marble headstones and limestone objects. As such, we were testing the thickness that would be required to block such a curse. Mr. Potter also had the idea that the marble object could be charmed to be feather light and used like a traditional shield."

Bones was dumfounded. Conventional wisdom held that the killing curse was unblockable, with the only defense being to attempt to dodge it. No one in her memory had ever thought to ask a survivor how they did it.

"Thank you Professor. I'll wait downstairs. I apologize profusely for interrupting your lesson. Please continue." She walked downstairs and went into the library. She could see that each of the teens had set up a study area. She found Susan's and took a look - Apparation, conjuring, advanced charms. It suddenly dawned on her that her Grandniece had studied more this holiday than all of the other holidays combined. She apparently had been given the opportunity to participate in a Wizard's apprentice program. Such an opportunity had not presented itself in her lifetime. She was not a wealthy woman, and wasn't certain what Dumbledore would charge for such an opportunity. She vowed to herself to find the funds to help her take advantage of such a program. A half hour later the five came down.

The students each thanked the tiny professor who took his leave and left.

She asked them about the events leading up to the capture yesterday. Susan explained how they wanted some practical practice and the idea of grabbing Malfoy formed. She described the training that they had gone through, the planning, the rehearsals, the actual capture, and finished with telling of being rescued by Harry after being stunned. After several minutes Susan finished. Amelia was both astonished at the change in her Grandniece, and delighted in the confidence with which she spoke.

Harry finally spoke. "Director Bones, if there is blame to be had, it is mine. I wanted to get Malfoy and the others volunteered to help me. He laid his wand down on the table in front of her. If you are here to charge me of a crime, I'm ready to go. The others are blameless."

Amelia smiled at the young leader. "I did not come here to arrest you Harry, rather to congratulate you. Draco is being interrogated as we speak and will be charged with at least a dozen murders by the end of the day. I would like to ask you a few questions in private if you wouldn't mind." The others went into the kitchen to get lunch. There was no transfiguration lesson that day, so they had a few hours off until defense in the afternoon.

Sitting down in one of the comfortable leather chairs, Amelia asked, "What I would like to know is your assessment of the capture. What did you like, what would you do differently, and how did you allow one of your teammates to get hit?"

Harry began. "We didn't know if Malfoy would show up that day, or what time. I was happy with the preparation and the initial insertion. No one saw us until I'd stunned Malfoy and he was being manacled. He was taken away within ten or eleven seconds after being hit. Where we could have done better was to have left without waiting for the second team to run over. Mr. Parkinson probably thought his house was being attacked. We were there about five seconds longer than we needed to be. I saw Susan get stunned and rushed to pick her up. We left immediately afterward. I took her to her room, and a healer that we'd hired was stationed here in case anyone had gotten

hurt immediately attended her to. So to answer your second question, I'll practice exiting faster."

To say that she was impressed would have been a serious understatement. "What would you have done if something had gone wrong?"

"We had your telephone number ready to call on our cellular telephone if we needed assistance. We had agreed beforehand to leave immediately if Malfoy was not alone. What we didn't know was if he had planned to come to the front or the back door. I guessed that he would come to the back door because the back garden is more secluded than the front yard."

Amelia was satisfied. Her own Aurors had been unable to locate Malfoy in two weeks of searching, and she doubted that many would have conceived, let alone executed a better plan. "What can I do to help you Mr. Potter?"

This was not a question that Harry had expected to hear from the Director of Magical Law enforcement. "Perhaps if you have any training manuals ma'am. I don't know if it would be possible to get apparation learner permits for Susan, Hermione and Ginny, but that would be very useful. Also, if we could use the three sets of apparation manacles, it would be less of an imposition on Auror Tonks."

"Have you considered any type of body armor?"

Harry smiled and unbuttoned his shirt showing Amelia his vest. "I bought these for everyone. I didn't think to get matching pants or headgear. I'll take care of that this afternoon."

Bones was amazed. Her own department didn't have body armor anywhere near this good. "Harry, that's quite expensive."

"Not really ma'am. They were two thousand each. We picked out horntail because it offered the most protection."

“Thank you Harry. Thank you for taking Susan into your home, and providing her with this opportunity. Thank you for taking such good care of her. Professor Dumbledore mentioned the apprentice program this September. Would he really accept Susan into it?”

“I specifically requested that he offer her the opportunity. I have agreed to fund any charges incurred for myself, Ginny, Hermione and Susan including tuition should they decide to join. I don't think that the Professor has mentioned it to any of them yet. There are a few more things that would be useful Director if they would be possible?”

“Ask away Harry.”

“First, I inherited some muggle weapons. I don't know if I need a permit for them, but I'd like to learn how to use them. Second please don't mention our names in connection to Malfoy or Pettigrew, finally please don't take any action against Tonks. She may have bent a few rules in helping...”

“Stop Harry.” Amelia was smiling. “Auror Tonks will most likely be promoted for the unaided capture of two known killers. Show me your weapons, and I will have a permit approved this afternoon. Please be very careful with them. I'll send an instructor over next week. Finally, I wonder if the four of you would be willing to accompany me for dinner this evening. I know that you have all been working hard, and don't get out that much. Would six be too early?”

“No. What should we wear?”

“Your choice – wizard or muggle?”

“I can't speak for Susan, but Hermione and Ginny would probably prefer wizarding.”

“Wonderful. School robes or something nicer would do fine. I will come for you at six. Please tell the others.”

“Thank you Director.”

“Amelia, Harry.” She took a set of Auror manuals out of her bag and resized them. She said, “I have one last request for you Harry.”

“Anything.”

“I know that Susan really looks up to you. Please continue to take good care of her. It’s rarely wrong to leave a fight that you aren’t likely to win. You can always return another time.”

“I’ll remember that. Thanks again for everything. We’ll see you at six.”

Five hours later and one quick trip to Malkin’s for Susan accompanied by Tonks, they were all ready. Susan had picked out a set of scarlet red robes that looked fantastic on her. Ginny wore a set of laced black robes that she looked fabulous in. Hermione had a set of ice blue robes that looked great on her. The women had spent time fixing their hair and all looked very pretty.

Seeing the teens dressed up, Dan asked them where they were going. Susan replied that that her Auntie was taking them out to a wizarding restaurant for dinner. At five to six, Amelia knocked on the door. Dobby let her in. She smiled when she saw the teens. They looked like four teens going to prom. Emma had taken several photos of them together. They held onto the coathanger that Amelia had created for a portkey. An instant later they were outside Spectators in Nott County. They were shown to their table. The view from their table was enchanted to change every five minutes or so from ocean beachfront to rainforest to Paris sidewalk. The music was entertaining without being too loud for conversation. Harry was talked into taking each of the women out for a dance or two each. Harry took Susan first. She was having a great time and gently guided Harry along the dance floor. He thanked her and asked Amelia next. She was a very good dancer and thanked Harry for making certain that Susan had a lovely set of robes to wear. Embarrassed, Harry told her that shopping seemed to be one of the favorite activities of all of his house guests. She asked him when Dumbledore was planning on mentioning the apprentice program. Harry told her probably by the end of the month. As they were dancing, Hermione visited with Harry,

and told him that he looked really great in his black robes with emerald green trim. She thanked him for a lovely time. When Harry was dancing with Ginny, he told her that she looked fantastic. As always, Ginny smelled great. After four dances, dinner arrived. Their tastes were as varied as they were. Harry ordered a steak and potatoes, Amelia ordered Asian, Hermione ordered French, Ginny ordered American, and Susan ordered seafood.

During dinner Amelia talked with them about the importance of being careful in their fieldtrips. Hermione pointed out that her own home had been the most dangerous place in the wizarding world that summer, and was grateful to be getting the opportunity to protect her family and make a difference. They asked about Malfoy. Amelia told them that based on the interrogations, there would be more arrests. Malfoy was being charged with his involvement in twelve murders and the destruction of Hermione's home. His trial would be scheduled sometime in August. His arrest would not be announced until the other suspects had been picked up.

After desert, they enjoyed the music for a while. Ginny asked Harry to dance with her again. "What's on your mind Harry?"

Harry, who had been thinking about the apprentice program, came up with an acceptable answer, "How delicious you look this evening, Miss Weasley."

"That's better. You look pretty nice yourself Mr. Potter. You clean up quite nicely."

"Thanks."

"When we get back, can we talk about that's on your mind?"

Harry nodded. The dance was over, and it was time to return home. They all thanked Amelia for a great dinner and a fantastic evening.

At ten Ginny came in to see Harry. He was reading one of the Auror guides that Amelia had given him on escape techniques. Seeing Ginny, he put the book away and called her over to sit in front of the fireplace with him. They sat there for a few minutes when there was a

soft knock on the door. Susan and Hermione were there sleeping bags in hand. Ginny invited them in and they sat and visited for a few hours until they drifted off in front of the warm fire.

On Sunday, Dumbledore returned with Amelia, Molly and Arthur. He explained the apprenticeship program to them as well as the Grangers. The Weasleys were amazed at the opportunity, understanding that an apprentice program with a master wizard such as Dumbledore had not been offered in their lifetime. The Grangers may have thought that the program sounded quaint, but did not express the opinion.

When asked what was next, Dumbledore replied that Harry knew of the program and with their permission, Dumbledore would discuss the specifics of the program with the teens on Wednesday afternoon. Amelia and the Weasleys agreed immediately. The Grangers asked if they would still take the NEWT examinations, and if the teens would still have the same post graduate opportunities. Amelia replied that it would be the equivalent as if Albert Einstein had offered to teach their daughter mathematics and physics. Dumbledore replied, "I am aware of your daughter's profound intelligence. Were she to apply to Oxford or one of the wizarding postgraduate programs, I promise you that she would be admitted regardless of her decision. In each of their cases, they will need to evaluate whether the content of the proposed program will in fact meet their individual needs and wishes. Molly and Arthur, in Ginny's case, she would finish her schooling a year early. To keep things documented, she will be eligible to take her OWLs in the fall. Given that she started school somewhat late, this would be an opportunity for her to graduate with her year." Seeing the Grangers' puzzled looks, Molly explained that Ginny had been born several months prematurely, and had taken several years to catch up. As such, she started school older for her grade.

The Weasleys looked in on the class that was in session. Minerva was showing them how to transfigure metal objects. Arthur commented that the large metal plates seemed a bit advanced for class, but they looked very pleased at the results. The teens saw

Ginny's parents at the doorway and walked over to greet them. Molly gave each of the teens a hug and Arthur shook their hands.

Harry invited them to stay for lunch. They told them about their studies, omitting the Malfoy capture. Ginny announced that they would be going for their apparation testing the next day. Molly was amazed at the progress that the four had made. Harry and Hermione asked about Ron, Luna, and the other Weasleys. They still had not reached reconciliation with Percy. Ron was spending his time practicing Quidditch with Luna.

After lunch, Tonks took them to Diagon Alley where they were measured for their dragon hide pants, and hats. The pants would look like fitted leather pants, while the headwear would look like the old style aviator wear. Harry thought that the women looked very good in their leather pants. Tonks wondered why the department did not have budget for such high quality protective gear.

That evening Tonks and Ginny sat with Harry as he practiced his morph. Harry was able to change his height several inches and appear to add three stone (about 42 pounds) in mass. After that he changed his hair to shoulder length light brown. Aside from the thin scar on his forehead, there was very little resemblance to the teen who she'd had lunch with.

Dumbledore came by the next day for their defense lesson. He showed them how to strengthen their shields and gave them several new defensive spells to learn. At the end of the lesson he asked them if any of them knew Marietta Edgecombe.

They all said that they did. Dumbledore said, "Good. She'll be your next practical exercise."

Wednesday morning Dumbledore came over. Dobby and Winky placed an extra setting at the table for him. He asked Remus he'd had a chance to look at the plate metal that they'd transfigured earlier in the week. Remus said that he had, and only two of the plated had to be remade. After breakfast, Tonks took the Grangers back to the

construction site. Their home had been framed, and the windows would go in that week.

Dumbledore and Remus levitated the plates into the cellar and began placing them. Susan and Hermione went down to see what the noise was. Dumbledore explained that the plates were being used as a backstop for a shooting range, and the ductwork was for ventilation.

Chapter 14

Thursday morning Harry sent an owl to Neville wishing him a happy birthday. Hermione had gotten him a wand holster for his new wand and Harry sent him a pair of Dragonhide boots. Ginny's owl looked up to the task. Just in case, Flitwick had placed a temporary lightening charm on the package. Harry had written Neville a note telling him that he was looking forward to seeing him again.

A few minutes after releasing the owl, there was a tap on the window. Three ministry owls were waiting outside. Remus opened the window and let the owls in. At lunch, he gave Susan, Hermione, and Harry their envelopes. Susan received eleven OWLs, Hermione a perfect sixteen, while Harry received twelve. Remarkably he had passed divination and astronomy. He had not finished the exam in history of magic due to the vision received by Voldemort and they had witnessed Professor McGonagall being attacked during the Astronomy exam and had been glad to have scraped by a passing mark in that class. They each congratulated each other. Hermione's parents were quite pleased with her scores and offered to take everyone out the next evening to celebrate.

Remus finished the work on the cellar that afternoon. They had created a four station fifty foot shooting range. It was well ventilated, with lighting that offered day and evening simulations.

Harry woke early on Saturday. He got up to use the exercise machine before the women and worked on the overhead arm exercises designed to increase flexibility and range of motion. Twenty minutes later, the four women came in, and Harry knew that they liked to exercise together. Emma brought her portable CD player, and they had fun exercising to Rod Stewart songs. They all greeted and teased Harry as he was leaving. Harry went back to his room and did pushups and sit-ups for twenty minutes, before showering and getting dressed for the morning.

Harry read the Daily Prophet with some interest.

Ministry Auror Captures Death Eaters

(London – Rita Skeeter)

Director of Magical Law Enforcement Amelia Bones announced the arrests of two Death Eaters. Draco Malfoy 16 son of convicted Death Eater Lucius Malfoy was charged in the connection of 12 deaths including Harry Potter's last living relatives and nine Ministry Aurors this month. He was also charged with destruction of property. Also charged was Peter Pettigrew 36. Pettigrew previously believed to have been killed by Sirius Black fifteen years ago was found alive and well in West Sussex at the home that was attacked in which twelve ministry Aurors and Hit Wizards were murdered. Pettigrew was also charged yesterday with the murder of Minister of Magic Diggory's son Cedric 14 months ago. This reporter applauds the Aurors responsible for the capture of these two (alleged) vicious killers. Trials are expected for both next week. See related story page 4 – Black cleared.

Harry looked at the article and smiled. He had almost avoided any mention in the article and amused himself thinking of the dread of any of Voldemort's Death Eaters to show their Dark Lord the article. He half wondered if Riddle had a subscription, or had an elf pick up his morning edition. He pitied any elf that would have to deliver this edition.

At eight Flitwick came and showed them how to meter the strength of spells, and showed them several additional ideas for strengthening their spells. McGonagall came at ten and asked what had happen to the plate steel that they had been transfiguring for the last week. Harry took them down to the cellar and showed them the shooting range. They were amazed. The backstop pieces fit together perfectly as did the lighter weight ceiling pieces that they had made. Remus had purchased target carriers and fitted retrieval wires that could be used to move the targets forward and backwards.

Completing her lesson on solid blocks, she took Hermione, Susan, and Ginny to the apparation testing station. Meanwhile Kingsley had come over and was giving Tonks, Harry, and Remus a lesson on safe pistol handling, and some practice at the range. Harry owned six

pistols, and Kingsley had brought him a good supply of ammunition for each of them. After a few minutes Dan came down and asked if he could watch. Kingsley showed them how to properly grip each of the weapons, sight them, and fire them. Each of them had been given a pair of hearing protection earmuffs looking something like over the ear headphones. Surprisingly Dan did the best in the target practice with all of his shots grouped well within the CD sized black area of the paper targets from fifty feet. He confessed to having had some previous practice. When they were done, Kingsley showed them how to clean the weapons and how to lock them up in the storage container that Remus had bought for them.

Two hours later, Minerva came back with the women. Each had earned a provisional apparition permit that allow them to apparate either to a place that they had already been, within the British Isles that Amelia had personally signed. They could get an unrestricted license on their seventeenth birthday. Hermione had inquired regarding the difference between their permit and the one that Harry had received, and been told that since Harry had no parent or legal guardian, he was considered an emancipated minor and was eligible for an unrestricted license.

The girls had errands to run after lunch, so Harry had a private lesson with Dumbledore. Harry demonstrated his progress with morphing, then Dumbledore gave Harry some details about Marietta Edgecombe. Dumbledore believed her to be a newly recruited Death Eater, likely one of the new recruits that was involved at the raid at the Grangers. Dumbledore warned Harry to take the capture very seriously as Marietta's mother was a skilled witch that worked at the floo office of the Ministry.

At four Dan requested that they be ready to leave for dinner at 4:30. They would come back after dinner for cake for Harry's birthday. They drove to a nearby pub, Sherlock's Home. The reservation was for 5:00. Tonks and Remus said that they would meet them there as there was only room for six in Dan's BMW. Harry sat in front and the four women crowded the back. Harry commented that he could have ridden in the boot – in fact he'd had plenty of practice at it. Dan laughed, thinking that Harry was making a joke. A tear welled in Ginny's eye, knowing that Harry was telling them a horrible truth.

Dan found a place to park. Based on the lack of cars parked near the pub, it did not look crowded. Emma told the teens that she'd made a reservation. They got out of the car and walked to the pub. Dan opened the door

"Surprise!!!" They were greeted by most of the members of the DA, the Weasleys, a few of the Hufflepuffs, most of the Order, a half dozen of the Aurors, several of the school professors, quite a few of the Gryffindors, several alumni from the Quidditch team, and a few others. Standing off to the side, feeling very pleased with themselves were Remus and Tonks. Only an observant few noticed Harry putting away his wand.

The beer was good. Everybody toasted Harry. He had fun visiting with the different people that his houseguests had invited. None of the students except the Weasleys knew that it had been Hermione's home that had been attacked.

Ron and Luna came up to Harry. Ron clearly had been doing some serious shopping. He told Harry that he'd gotten himself a new Firebolt, and looked like he'd taken after Gred & Forge with respect to fashion sense. Luna looked very pretty in jeans and a skinny top. She had blond hair that fell about to her shoulders, and was a bit more muscular than Ginny had been at the end of the school year. Spending so much time outside with Ron in July, she had a very nice tan. Ron asked Harry if he'd seen the article regarding the arrest of Malfoy. Harry said that he had, but never mentioned any more than that. Ron in his usual one-dimensional manor smirked that the Slytherin team wouldn't stand a chance in the next term. It occurred to Harry that the Gryffindor team would likely be facing some personnel changes itself.

Dumbledore introduced Remus to Anna Daily, the new potions professor. She seemed like a very nice lady, and had a keen eye for detail. Remus was quite interested in meeting her, given that she had been largely responsible for the development of the Wolfsbane potion.

Anna watched the different people who had come to the gathering. She noticed that Harry seemed to have a disproportionate amount of

adult friends. Not being British, she was less familiar with the boy-who-lived legend than most of the others who were there.

Hagrid had come. He told them that he'd been spending a lot of time with his half-brother Grawp, who was learning English and was apparently much gentler. Unlike the last time that Harry had seen Hagrid, there were no cuts or bruises on his face this time.

The Aurors had chipped in and gotten Harry a pro model sneak-o-scope. They were profoundly grateful over the gifts that the Sirius Black foundation had made to the families of their fallen co-workers. Tonks made the introductions. They were not in awe of the boy-who-lived, rather the on friendly terms with the generous, competent young man in front of them.

Minister Diggory had stopped by to wish Harry well. Several of the Hufflepuffs there had been friends with Cedric and said hello to him. Hanna and Justin greeted him warmly.

Molly and Arthur seemed as glad to see Harry as their daughter. News of their growing relationship apparently had reached Molly who couldn't have been more delighted. Beyond that, they were truly happy that Harry wasn't living on Privet Drive anymore. Ginny had relayed the details of the story of his growing up to an outraged Molly.

Moody came by and shook Harry's hand like an equal. He had trained a number of the Aurors who had been murdered, and took their deaths very personally.

Harry visited with Neville a bit. After the truth of the fight in the DoM had reached his Grandmother, life for Neville had vastly improved. She no longer thought of him as a failure, rather she saw him as a young man with good friends, and talent. Though he didn't have Harry's opportunity to practice spellwork, he had spent a good part of the summer practicing potions and herbology. Neville was also studying for hours each day. The news that they would be having a new potions professor was like a rainbow after a storm to the young man that had been constantly berated by Snape.

Cho asked Harry if he would be allowed back on the house team next term. Harry told her that he didn't think he'd be playing again at Hogwarts. Harry asked her if she'd talked with Marietta over the holiday. She hadn't seen her since June.

Dan and Emma enjoyed meeting so many witches and wizards. It seemed comforting to them that there were various wizarding careers. Most of them seemed to have known their daughter and commented that they respected her talents.

After the party, Harry invited Arthur and Molly back to his home. He'd thanked everyone for coming, and wished them a good rest of their holiday.

The next week was spent getting ready to grab Marietta Edgecombe. The actual preparation turned out to be much harder than the grab. Positioning themselves in place at 6:00 AM, they simply waited until Mrs. Edgecombe left for work. Hermione was holding Ginny's owl under the invisibility cloak. Harry, and Remus were in the front yard keeping watch.

At 8:00, Tonks called Remus using Harry's cell phone, letting her know that Michelle Edgecombe had arrived at work. He signaled the other group. Carefully folding up the cloak, the disillusioned teens spread out slightly, each finding some cover.

Hermione let the owl go who was carrying a blank piece of parchment. The owl tapped on the window by the back garden door. Marietta opened the door and having taken careful aim, the three witches each fired stunners, each hitting the young witch. Susan ran up with the anti-apparation manacles while Hermione and Ginny kept a sharp eye for anyone else who may have seen her get hit. Ten seconds later, Susan activated the portkey, vanishing along with Marietta. Hermione and Ginny apparated away next followed by Harry and Remus. Seventeen seconds after Marietta had opened the door, they were all in Harry's car park. Tonks arrived back a moment later. Upon inspection, Marietta did indeed have the Mark on her left inner forearm.

Careful to put everything away, the teens stuffed their knapsacks while Tonks portkeyed away to the holding cells. Harry and the others walked back into the home. They were met by Dumbledore and Poppy. "How was your breakfast Harry?"

"Great. Everybody got what we were looking for."

"Splendid. When the four of you are ready, we might begin our morning lesson. Poppy has volunteered to show everyone some first aid – always an excellent topic. I need to meet with Amelia. I will see you all this afternoon."

Poppy had brought one of her mannequins and showed them how to magically heal basic cuts. Sensing that their minds were not on her lesson, she asked them how their outing went. After they told her what they had really been up to, she adopted a grim look on her face, and talked for a moment about the sad conclusions of inappropriate choices. She said that she would be back the next week, and they could continue with their lessons. They could practice with the mannequin during the week. They each thanked her profusely for standing by for them while they were gone.

That afternoon, Remus came back from taking the Grangers out for their business. He came back and gave them a second lesson on stealth and concealment. They learned to move nearly silently and to be virtually unseen if standing still while disillusioned.

He also showed them how to cast spells without using schoolboy loud voices. The advantages were that the opponent didn't hear what had been cast, and they were much less likely to give away their position.

Draco Malfoy's trial on Friday 9 August was amazingly straightforward. The visitors were seated first. In this case, the courtroom was packed with Hogwarts students and their parents. Malfoy's arrogance had earned him more than his share of enemies. Twenty minutes later the witnesses and others were shown in. In this case, it was Harry Potter, and the Grangers. Finally the judges came

in followed by the defendant. The charges were read, and Malfoy's deposition was read into evidence. Hit Wizard Wood's chilling pensive memory was played ending with Bones asking the dying man for his last memory. The Grangers had provided documentation regarding their property loss.

Malfoy was given the opportunity to say something on his behalf or to call in a defense witness. He did neither. The full Wizengamot judge panel called a recess to confer. When they came back, the verdict was read.

"Draco Malfoy you have been charged with participating in the murders of Vernon Dursley, Petunia Dursley, Dudley Dursley, Auror Nick Straight hand." The list of charges seemed endless. Finally Dumbledore finished with, "...and the willful destruction of a fine residence in Crawley. The Wizengamot finds you to be guilty of all charges. Since you are at least the age of sixteen and not yet seventeen, the damages will need to be paid from your parents assets. The damages were estimated at 75,000 Galleons. Since this was willful destruction of property, you are fined ten times the amount of damages or 750,000 Galleons. You are also sentenced to life imprisonment in Azkaban."

Narcissa looked shocked. Never in her memory had such a fine been levied. There was no appeal. A Gringotts representative was there and confirmed that there were sufficient assets in the Malfoy vault to cover the fine. Narcissa was handed a Gringotts draft and signed it.

At the same time that the verdict was being read, two redheaded men stopped over at Malfoy manor. Four containers of diesel fuel and a flare gun later, they had finished their work.

As Narcissa was writing the Gringotts draft for the 750,000 Galleons fine, explosions from the various dark devices stored under the study were consuming the remainder of her home. She would return at the end of the day, nearly broke, and homeless. No one would ever trace the flare gun which had been consumed in the fire.

Chapter 15

Sunday 11 August started as a perfect day for Ginny's sixteenth birthday. Molly and Arthur had arranged for a day at one of the ocean beaches in Brighton. The day was perfect - Hot with a light breeze. They all apparated or were given portkeys to get there. Tonks, Remus, and Kingsley had come along, and took turns being on watch. It was fun to see their friends from school. Neville, Lavender, Collin, Dennis, Seamus, and most of the Gryffindors from Ginny's year had come. Ron and Luna spent time with Harry and Ginny in the surf, just being sixteen. It was fun to spend the day with them. Harry realized how much he missed spending time with his buddy. They split into teams of witches and wizards for a game of volleyball. Whether distracted by some of the witches in their very small bikinis, or bad luck, the witches easily won two out of three games.

Bill and Fleur came along with Charlie, and the twins. They had fun catching up on their news. At one point Bill came over to Harry and politely requested that Harry continue to take excellent care of Ginny. Ron seemed to have gotten over with his obsession of being overprotective of his baby sister, either because he'd heard that she could definitely take care of herself, or that she was in Harry's care. Regardless of the reason, Harry was relieved not to have been harassed constantly.

Neville seemed to have gone through a complete change. Where there used to be a round face, round everywhere boy completely lacking in confidence, stood a well-built 5' 11 young man with a wicked smile. He'd been studying and working out all summer. Each passing day was suiting him better and better. As a result, he had nothing to be ashamed of while wearing his swimsuit. Lavender seemed to be a lot more interested in him now than last year.

Ron and Luna seemed to really be enjoying each other's company. Luna had blossomed into a very pretty young woman with obvious intelligence and confidence. Certainly she still possessed her unique view of the world, but most of the others were beginning to see it as charming rather than weird. Ron was about 6'1 and had acquired a confidence of his own. Whether as a result of maturity, or the

prospect of never having another hand-me-down in his life, it didn't matter. He too had blossomed.

The afternoon wore into the early evening and a chill entered the air. Shortly after dinner, most of the guests left. Harry invited the Weasleys and Susan's Aunt back to Grimmauld place for a bit more cake. They arrived at eight. Harry opened one of the bottles of Napoleon Brandy that he had and gave the Grangers, Amelia, Molly, Arthur, Fleur, Charlie, and Bill some. They spent a fun hour looking at his home, each marveling at how much better it looked. True to form, Arthur was delighted with the entertainment room. He had fun with the different remotes while Dan, Emma, and Molly looked on in quiet amusement.

Hermione, Ginny and Susan showed Fleur the library. Amelia inspected the gun range that they had built, marveling at what a wonderful training facility the young man had made. She was pleased to note that the weapons were held in a locked container, separate from the locked container marked ammunition.

Charlie, and Bill had taken notice of the third floor practice room. Bill commented that he could tell that there had been quite a bit of spell work done in the room. Harry told him that they'd been having the lessons and defensive practice up here.

Fortunately they never got down to the cellar, so Harry didn't have to explain the gun range. By 9:30 Charlie, Bill, Fleur, and Amelia had left, each wishing Ginny a happy birthday.

At ten PM two terrible things happened. The floo network connection at the burrow was disconnected. Since no one at the time was attempting to use the floo either to or from the burrow, no one noticed. A moment later, nearly twenty Death Eaters apparated into the Weasley compound.

Molly and Arthur were over at Grimmauld place enjoying a beverage and a second slice of Ginny's birthday cake. Ron had left twenty minutes before saying that Luna had to be home by ten.

They were in the entertainment room watching a DVD when Harry had a blinding headache. Fighting it he shouted, "Mr. And Mrs. Weasley, we need to leave now. The burrow is under attack!"

Harry gave Dan his cell phone and asked that he call Director Bones. He gave him the number and left.

Pop, pop, pop, pop. The teens arrived in the back garden. "Reducto, Reducto, Reducto, Reducto." Outnumbered at least four to one, Harry was not going to take chances stunning the Death Eaters. Each of the Death Eaters that the teens had hit had massive tissue damage from the spells that were normally used to blast objects.

Inside Ron and Luna were in Ron's room snogging. Luna smelled smoke. Pushing Ron off her, she got up, pulled on her shirt, and shouted, "Ron, the house is on fire!"

Being that his room was on the top floor, the thick smoke had quickly reached his door.

"Reducto, Reducto, Reducto, Reducto." Another four Death Eaters went down. Some hadn't even realized that anyone else had arrived. Pop, Pop. Molly and Arthur arrived, and desperately tried to get into the house that had been magically sealed shut ignoring the jets of light flying in their direction.

Ron and Luna dashed down the top flight of stairs, only to reach the flames in the stairway. Luna cast a flame freezing charm, and they made it down the middle flight of stairs.

"Avada Kedavra." A witch with a short wand, cast a spell at Ginny who nimbly dodged the killing curse.

"Reducto, Reducto." Harry and Susan brought down two more of the attackers.

"Avada Kedavra." Death Eater Travers fired a killing curse directly at Hermione, who'd conjured a marble slab that cracked as the green jet hit it, stopping the blast. It was the last thing that he ever did.

“Whoosh Harry had cast the flame cutter curse on Travers, slicing him in two.

BOOM. The sky light up bright as mid-day. The burrow was gone, exploding into a million pieces. It would be a half hour before the investigators would find the remains of Ron and Luna who had both been thrown across the hedge by the blast.

Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. A dozen Aurors appeared on the scene. Hearing them arrive, the remaining Death Eaters immediately vanished.

Each badly burned by the fire, Molly and Arthur desperately searched for Ron and Luna. Hoping that they were at the Lovegoods, they apparated into Ottery St. Catchpole.

Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop. Four Mediwitches had arrived and began a fruitless effort to find someone in need of first aid.

Pop, pop, pop, pop. Dumbledore, Poppy, Minerva and Flitwick arrived looking for Order members who needed aid, and for the teens.

Pop, Pop, Pop. Molly, Arthur, and Mr. Lovegood had returned. “Ron, Luna,” came her increasingly desperate calls for her children.

The fire was burning itself out, and the area was getting darker. Dumbledore, cast “Lumos Magnus,” and the yard was light up as if by a series of floodlights.

Harry, Ginny, Susan, and Hermione were all holding each other crying. Dumbledore found them and immediately created a portkey to get them back to Grimmauld place. They ended up on the third floor training area.

A few minutes later, Kingsley found Ron and Luna's bodies. Calling Amelia over, she looked at the two, and went to find Molly and Arthur who were being treated by the Mediwitches. Taking a steadying breath, she said, “Arthur, Molly, I’m sorry to have to tell you, we found Ron and Luna’s bodies on the other side of the hedge.”

Arthur held his best friend as she became violently ill.

Minerva left to go to Grimmauld place and tell the teens. Hestia left to find the twins.

Back at Grimmauld place, Dan and Emma were trying to get the story out of the frantic and exhausted teens. Five minutes later Dobby showed Minerva in. Finding the six, she could think of little to say. "I'm sorry to tell you that Ron and Luna had apparently been in the house, and were both killed by the blast."

"Nooooooooo," howled Ginny. "Oh nooooooooo." The four teens held each other sobbing at the loss of their friends.

Poppy was shown into the house. She had brought several calming draughts and gave them to Hermione and Ginny. Acting the same as a dreamless sleeping potion, the two young women curled up on two of the sofas. Poppy conjured blankets for each of them.

Amelia came in. "Harry, Susan, thank Merlin you're both OK. What happened?"

Harry related the events from the time that she'd left. Harry told her about the vision that he'd had, and how they saw so many Death Eaters in the firelight when they arrived.

Bones replied, "Ten Death Eaters were killed, and another is mortally wounded. Most of them were older. We had known that Travers, and both of the Borgins, were active and had suspected that Mrs. Crabbe, Mrs. Goyle, and Mrs. Flint were active Death Eaters. There were several Death Eaters that we haven't identified yet."

Harry nodded, and said, "They didn't hear us arrive, there was so much noise and confusion, it was a few seconds before any of them saw us and started cursing us."

“Harry, we’re doing forced memory extractions on the dying Death Eater, but we will need to talk again tomorrow. I’ll be back at nine. All of you, please get some rest.” She gave Harry and Susan each a hug and turned to leave.

Harry thought for a second and asked, “Wait. Where are the Weasleys going to stay? Please let them know that we have plenty of room here.”

“I will. Both of them were badly burned, and will be spending the evening in St. Mungo's.”

Dan and Emma came back from talking with Minerva. She told them that Ron and Luna had been killed when their home had been attacked, and that Arthur and Molly had been badly injured.

Harry could see that his professor had still not fully recovered from her own injuries from last spring and was also exhausted. He sent her up to Ginny’s room for the evening. Winky helped find her some things for the evening. Harry levitated Hermione and Ginny up to Hermione’s room.

Harry sat on the sofa in front of his bedroom fireplace, with tears rolling down his face for his friend. Images of an eleven year old Ron taking the Hogwarts express filled Harry’s memory. As Harry has thinking about Ron being carried on the shoulders of the Quidditch team last year having won the cup with the refrain of Weasley is our king, the door creaked open. Ginny walked in unnoticed by Harry. Wearing only the thinnest nightgown, she slipped on the sofa in front of Harry and wrapped his arms around her.

Harry woke up at 4:30. Realizing that he’d repeated the same mistake with his hands, he gently moved them to a safer location. He was surprised when a moment later, Ginny moved them back, and purred in her sleep.

At 6:00 Harry got up and showered. He went up to the third floor to work out. This time, he was the only one up there. He put on a U2 CD and lifted weights in anger for an hour. After taking a second shower, he went down to the library. Dobby had brought several copies of the Prophet.

Death Eaters Foiled in Deadly Raid

(London – Lacy Pureheart)

Eleven Death Eaters were killed last night in a deadly raid that also left two victims dead.

Ronald Weasley and Luna Lovegood were killed in an attack on the Weasley residence. Ministry official Arthur Weasley and his wife Molly were seriously injured attempting to rescue the pair in the blaze that destroyed their home. Hogwarts Professor Dumbledore was quoted as saying, "The wizarding world will certainly miss Luna and Ron. They added so much to the lives of those who knew them."

Witnesses said that approximately twenty Death Eaters began the attack on the home at about ten PM. Ministry officials had not commented on who the unnamed heroes were who helped to stop the attack. Ministry officials have not yet released the names of the Death Eaters.

Hestia had spent most of the night looking through the force extracted memories of Thomas Borgin the shopkeeper turned Death Eater. Since there was a wider range of memories to search through, it took much longer than viewing a specific pensive memory. Rather it was like watching a VCR tape played in fast forward mode. After nine hours she found what she was looking for. Immediately prior to the attack, she saw what she was looking for – the Death Eaters staging for the attack. As they were putting on their masks, Delores Umbridge unmistakably came to light. She stopped the memory at that spot, and called Director Bones.

Ginny woke up alone. Memories of last night flooded her mind – The screaming, the moaning of the wounded, the blood, the terror of seeing her parent's home destroyed, the deafening news that Ron and Luna had been murdered.

She wandered down to the entertainment room. Hermione was sitting in one of the sofas between her parents in a fetal position. Amelia was sitting on another holding her Grandniece. Harry was sitting on the third sofa by himself. Still wearing her night gown, and covered in a blanket, she sat down beside him.

Harry came out of his introspective thoughts and put his arms around Ginny, rocking her gently.

A few minutes later, Remus came in. He looked at each of them for a moment, not saying anything. After a moment, Harry noticed him, and Remus walked over and stood behind the pair.

Noticing the movement, Hermione and Susan looked over and walked over to Harry's sofa, and sat on either side of Harry and Ginny.

Poppy came over at eight long with Minerva. A few minutes later, Dumbledore came.

Amelia got call from Hestia. She and Dumbledore had the four teens go to her office for a few minutes to look at the pensive. They met Tonks and Shackbolt there.

Bones called Tonks, Dumbledore, Shackbolt, and the four teens to her office. Fifteen minutes later they all had arrived. Explaining that the memory that they would be seeing was graphic, and disturbing, Hestia got ready to start it. Bones asked that they watch to see if they recognized any of the Death Eaters.

Several of the people recognized Marcus Flint, and Delores Umbridge. Harry thought that he recognized Montague and possibly Theodore Nott.

She played the rest of the memory. As before it was brutally swift, beginning with the magical sealing of the house being magically sealed to twenty calls of “Inflambré”, effectively starting the entire home on fire immediately. Once the house was set ablaze, it was less than two minutes before Dumbledore had sent the teens back to Grimmauld Place. A few seconds later, the burrow exploded, and Hestia stopped the memory.

Dumbledore made a note to himself to have Poppy spend time with the teens both individually and together. Each of them had been forced to take one or more lives, and each had been subjected to incredible stress.

Amelia felt the same way, and asked that Tonks escort the teens back to Harry’s home using a portkey.

Chapter 16

Poppy was waiting for the teens when they arrived home. The war may have been going at a frantic pace at the moment, but the four teens were going to sit it out for a day. As before, they gravitated to Harry's sofa, and sat together comforting each other. They were quite intimate together, but it wasn't sexual. They just held each other, making skin-to-skin contact. The Grangers and Poppy smiled at the sight and left them alone for a while.

Charlie and Bill had looked through the rubble along with three of the Aurors and some of the Order members. Like the Grangers, they found the occasional item lying here or there in the grass – an unbroken plate, a book, or a kitchen knife or fork. Bill was unable to find what he was looking for. He tried spell work. "Accio Family clock." Nothing happened. Charlie tried, "Accio family clock pieces." Dozens of pieces came flying towards his outstretched wand. They tried repairing the clock, but it was too far gone. Carefully, they wrapped up each of the face hands in an envelope. After an hour or so, they had collected what there was to collect, and placed the items in a trunk. They apparated to Harry's car park, and went into the house.

An hour later Molly and Arthur were released from St. Mungo's and apparated to Harry's home. The twenty or so people who were there took turns hugging Arthur and Molly. Amos Diggory stopped by with his condolences, and offered to handle the memorial service arrangements. Dumbledore had made the same offer minutes before.

Amelia received a very distressing report. Odd Lovegood, Luna's father had apparently committed suicide early in the morning. She dispatched several Aurors and Arthur's workmate Perkins over to the Quibbler office to investigate. She routed the notification to the other department heads.

Reflecting, she felt a different stress in this war than the last. Vanishing witches and wizards marked the last war. This war was

marked with wizard-to-wizard battles. Of the three that have taken place, arguably the light side had won two. She realized that Harry Potter did not share such an attitude over losing his Godfather or Arthur Weasley losing a son last night. Her analytical side calculated the score at 31 Death Eaters killed or captured against 15 lost on the light side since late June.

There would be no investigation into the fire at the Malfoy Manor. She didn't know how the fire started, and didn't want to know. In her mind the Malfoys had lived a very wrongful life, and their collective actions had caught up with them. She listed the official cause of the fire as accidental. There was no sign of magic having been used to destroy the home. As such, she signed the case as closed.

Poppy sat in the library with the four teens sitting together on the sofa. The door was closed. She explained the wizarding memorial service tradition to the four. None of them had attended a wizarding memorial service before. She told them that it was very appropriate to grieve over the loss of two such fine people. She suggested that it was also appropriate to remember the happy moments that they had shared together. Harry was glad that he had purchased a wizarding camera and had taken pictures of their day at the beach. Poppy offered to get them processed, and get each of them sets or prints.

Poppy asked if they would mind if she came by again the next day. She was very easy to talk with, and had helped Harry earlier in the summer. They gladly agreed.

After Poppy left, Harry said to the others, "We know who did this. As my wizard's pledge to your brother, that witch will not be free by the time school starts. Let the Ministry worry about Flint, Montague and Nott. We will bring her down. I'd be happy to carve "I won't murder innocent witches and wizards" into her face with a blood quill.

He continued, "After she's gone, I'll find Bellatrix. After she's gone, I'll find Riddle. I've got too much to live for to let those witches and that monster ruin things for me any more. From what Pomfrey told us, the memorial service will be tomorrow or Wednesday. That leaves us two

and a half weeks to find her before term starts. Hermione, will you help me?"

Wiping the tears from her face, she nodded.

"Susan?"

The loyal Hufflepuff replied, "I'll do anything that you ask."

"Ginny?"

The pissed off redhead replied, "She's toast. Where do we start?"

Harry replied, "The hardest thing will be to find her. I see several possibilities. She might be at Riddle Manor in Little Hangleton, or Fudge may have hidden her. She may have been staying at Malfoy manor. It's too dangerous to go to Little Hangleton. I suggest that we watch Fudge's home. Could we find out if he has a vacation cottage someplace?"

Hermione replied, "There is a wizarding hall of records in the ministry. I think we can access the public records without needing special permission or having to tell anyone what we were looking for. If anyone asks, we can say that we are interested in purchasing a property."

Harry replied, "Perfect. Ginny, what can we do to help your parents?"

"They need a place to stay. Maybe we can shift the rooms around a bit. Hermione, could you room with me?"

Hermione and Susan giggled. "Ginny, have you even slept in your bed yet? Susan can take my room. I'll "room" with you. That will have your parents as far from Harry's room as possible."

Susan said, "I'll move my things and tell them. They'll need some clothing to wear."

“Hermione said, “My Mum and Dad will either go shopping with or for them. Winky could measure them up, and would pick out a few things for them at Madam Malkin’s.”

Ginny said, “Let’s go get them.”

Harry said, “I’ll do it.”

POP, POP. Dobby and Winky appeared. Dobby asked, “Harry Potter called sir. How can we help you?”

Harry asked that Dobby go and ask Molly and Arthur if they would come in, then get Dan and Emma. He asked that Winky bring some butterbeers.

Molly and Arthur came in a minute later. Harry asked, “Mrs. Weasley, first, we want to tell you how sorry we are about Ron and Luna, but second, I was wondering if we could possibly ask a favor of you both?”

Always the nurturing type, Molly fell for Harry’s lead in immediately. She replied, “Of course dear. How can we help you?”

Harry replied, “I was wondering if you possibly could stay here for a while. We are feeling really bad, and would feel much better if you two were here. Would that be possible?”

Arthur replied, “Thank you Harry. Thank you very much.”

Harry said, “There’s one other thing, if it wouldn’t be too much to ask?”

Molly said, “What is it dear?”

Harry said, “Well Winky is going to Madam Malkin’s to get us some more formal robes, and I was hoping that she could get a few thing for you both while she was there?”

Molly went over and Hugged Harry. Ginny went up to her dad, and gave him a huge hug. Meanwhile, Hermione had quietly asked her

parents if they would do some shopping for Ginny's parents. A minute later the teens had gone into the kitchen. Winky was measuring Arthur and Molly. Harry gave Emma 5,000 Sterling and thanked her for taking such good care of Ginny's parents. Winky came by a minute later with an extra copy of sizes, and the three Grangers were off to Harrods.

Dumbledore went to visit the twins. The sign on the jokeshop said, Closed until Further Notice. Dumbledore cast a spell and a silvery owl flew from his wand, through the shop door and up the stairs. A moment later, Angelina and Alicia opened the door. "Good afternoon, Professor. Please come in."

"Good afternoon, Miss Spinnet and Miss Johnson. I was wondering if I might have a word with Fred and George."

"Please Professor. They seem to think that the fire was somehow their fault. We'll wait down here. Please talk some sense into them."

Dumbledore thanked the girls and climbed the stairway up to the living area. Fred and George were both pissed, each having consumed the better part of a bottle of Ogden's. Dumbledore flicked his wand and the two bottles flew back to the shelf. Another tiny flick of his wand, and the twins sobered up. "Good afternoon, George and Fred. May I sit down?"

George looked up out of his ending stupor and said, "Hello Professor. Which of our family should we get killed this time?"

Dumbledore knew that they felt the need to shoulder the blame for their brother's death. He told them, "I would be inclined to agree that there was a correlation between Saturdays events and the tragedy at your family home last night. I would be very inclined to see a direct connection, except for one thing."

Fred asked, "What's that Professor?"

“Director Bones did a forced memory extraction of Death Eater Thomas Borgin before he died to preserve much of the official record regarding the case.”

Fred was waiting for the hammer to drop that he was directly responsible for Ron’s death.

Dumbledore continued, “The memory showed them planning the attack over the course of a week. Your parent’s home was probably targeted at the same time that the Granger home was selected. The only thing that delayed it was the capture of Draco Malfoy. Fred, George, it was a tragedy that Ron was entertaining Luna at the time of the attack. It was a tragedy that your parents lost so much. Please take the time to properly remember your brother Ron, but don’t carry the blame for what happened. You did not choose to murder anyone. Does any of that make sense?”

Gred and Forge looked at each other for a moment, seeming in their own version of a mind link. Finally the both replied, “Yes Professor. Thank you.”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled as he spoke. “Now, you have two spirited young ladies downstairs who are probably wondering where you’ve gone off to. I suggest that the four of you go and visit your parents at Mr. Potter’s home.”

George said, “Thanks for coming to look in on us Professor. Thank you very much. We’ll see you later.”

“Thank you both. I will take my leave now.” With that, the old wizard walked down the stairs and received warm hugs from two lovely women. Suddenly his day seemed a bit brighter.

They agreed to lay the three of them to rest together. Luna’s mother had been cremated, and did not have a marker. There was plenty of room in the Weasley family plot. For sake of security, they elected not to place a notice in the Prophet. Each person made a list of some people that they would want notified. Hermione took the individual

lists and created a master list. Professor Flitwick charmed 360 copies, and volunteered Filch to tie the notices to the school owls. The Services would be the next day at three. There was floo service nearby, so the logistics would be easier for the students who would not be able to apparate. Harry had to remind himself that Apparation was normally taught at the end of the sixth year and a person needed to be seventeen to get an unrestricted permit.

Harry reflected for a moment about wizarding homes. Few had electric, all had gas, either natural or LP. In the case of the burrow, since it was so far out of town, Harry surmised that they'd had a large LP tank by the house. He supposed that was the cause of the explosion in the fire. Had they died of smoke inhalation, or had bubble-headed charms on, and been desperately trying to break through the magical barriers? Did the Weasleys have an emergency portkey on the fireplace mantle? He thought probably not as portkeys were tariffed and an expensive way to travel. The Weasleys had live too long as a poor family to have changed their habits much in a few weeks. An idea was forming in his head, but he'd have to think about it a bit more.

Fudge read the morning paper and was shocked. It was out of characters for the Death Eaters to torch a home of a non-combatant with anyone in it. He knew that Umbridge had planned the raid on the Weasley home just as she had planned the raid in the Grainger girl's home. In both cases, she assured him that no one would get hurt. In both cases, she'd been completely wrong. He wondered if anyone would find out that he'd been letting her stay in his holiday cottage in Yorkshire? Why had he let himself get as close to the Death Eaters as he had? Deep down, he knew that Lucius had never really changed his spots after the first war. A little money here, some campaign support there, an offer to quietly clean up the occasional embarrassing tryst with young boys who suddenly developed morals, and within a year or so, he'd been hooked.

Fudge had never wanted to become involved with a murder. Beneath it all he liked Arthur even with all of his quirks. He never wanted any of his boys hurt. Fudge may have personally agreed with most of the

conservatives regarding the pure blood issue, but murdering a popular pure blood family member and torching a poor man's home wouldn't win their side any supporters. Fudge decided that he needed to do something and decided to risk it.

The old Auror sniffed the glass then poured his own beer, before sitting down. Having looked around the room to be certain that they weren't unduly being watched, Moody asked, "How can I help you Dumbledore?"

Dumbledore smiled at his paranoid old friend and replied, "As always. I'm looking for a qualified Defense Instructor."

Any trace of a smile that may have been on Moody's face vanished. "My last experience at Hogwarts was more confining than I'd expected. Would it be possible to split the job with someone? I've earned a bit of time off."

"I'd thought of asking Harry if he would be a Teacher's Assistant for the first and second year students. In reality he would have full responsibility for those two years. That would leave the job at about three days a week. Could that possibly work?"

Moody looked at his old friend and smiled. "OK. Let me know what he says. If he teaches, I'll teach. I don't think I would live in the castle if that would be all right?"

"That wouldn't be a problem. I will talk with Harry tomorrow. Good night Alastor."

"Yea. Good night, Dumbledore."

At five the next morning Harry awoke. Carefully disentangling himself from Ginny, he took a quick shower and went upstairs to work out. No one else was upstairs. He lifted weights for a few minutes then decided to work on his morphing. Harry willed himself to grow four

inches. He willed himself to darken his skin. Next he willed himself to have a shaved head. The concentration required to hold all three changes was immense. He wondered if he could lift weights while holding the changes and did arm exercises for ten minutes. Exhausted, he concentrated on his true appearance and changed back.

He went back down to his room to take another quick shower and get dressed for the day. He was nearly done with his shower when Ginny had come into the large shower stall with him. "Can I help you scrub your back Mr. Potter?" she asked him with an innocent smile on her face?"

"Only if I can help you with yours," he smiled back.

Finally it was time to leave. The memorial service for Ron, Odd, and Luna had been sad. There was no case of celebrating an older witches or wizard long and fruitful life. It was a parent burying a child. Dumbledore, Diggory, Flitwick, McGonagall and several others had come up to speak. Finally Harry and Hermione went up together and talked about the meaning of true friendship. They didn't talk long, each desperately hoping that their voices wouldn't break, but Harry'd hoped that it had been enough.

Harry had been overwhelmed at the number of people who'd come. All the current Gryffindors and hundreds of alumni had come, some with small children of their own. He recognized a dozen of the Ravensclaws and their parents, as well as every player from the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw Quidditch team. Many of the Ministry workers came as well as everyone that Harry knew of from the Order.

Bill and Fleur had come up to every person there and personally thanked him or her for coming. Molly had stood still as in a daze, with Arthur constantly at her side. With Harry's permission, Poppy had made hundreds of copies of the picture that Harry had taken of Ron and Luna at the beach to give out as a happy remembrance.

There was a bittersweet moment as they looked up and saw the members of the Chudley Cannons fly over in a missing-man formation. Harry knew that Ron would have given anything to have met them.

At the luncheon, Katie Bell had gone up to Harry asking about Quidditch in the fall. Harry told her that he wouldn't be playing, and suggested that she plan now on holding try-outs for every position as well as reserves with a bias toward third or fourth year students. Katie didn't question Harry about not playing, assuming that his lifetime ban was still in effect. Harry had said that he'd help her with the try-outs after she'd asked him.

Harry apparated back to the graveside. Touching the newly carved marble headstone, Harry said, "I'll take care of your sister Ron. I do love her a lot. I'll keep an eye on the twins and watch out for your parents. I'll take care of Hermione too. I'll put an end to Umbridge, Lestrangle, Riddle and the other Death Eaters, I promise you."

Harry hadn't noticed Dumbledore standing silently a few feet behind him.

Chapter 17

Monday – 21 August

Dumbledore sat in his office. He'd received the signed contract back from Anna Daily, knowing that she would become an exceptional potions instructor and head of house. She certainly knew her subject. More importantly she had a nurturing manner. He easily pictured her helping and coaching students rather than bullying or berating them. He had a conversation with the school governors and explained his plan for the Defense class. Surprisingly he'd met no resistance what so ever. He suspected that many of the governors had heard rumors of Harry's involvement in the captures of the different Death Eaters, and felt that a popular, young, light wizard who'd actually done something would be a good balance with the legendary Auror.

Tuesday morning as Harry and the others were having breakfast, a flock of owls had gathered outside the window. Like last time, they took turns unattaching the sympathy messages addressed either to him or the Weasleys, and offering the owls treats. One in particular caught Harry's eye. He took the message from the owl and opened it.

Dear Mr. Potter.

I'm truly sorry to hear about the death of your friend Ron. He didn't deserve to die.

Delores Umbridge is hiding out at:

The Seaside Cottage

Williston Road

Yorkshire

To my knowledge she is there alone.

Good luck

The note hadn't been signed. He showed it to Hermione and Ginny. Just as he put it down, it burst into flames. Harry was amazed. Hermione smiled and said, "Obviously the person who sent it to you wanted you to know the information, but didn't want any evidence that they had told you. They used a simple incendiary charm set to activate after the note had been read. They probably weren't too skilled at magic, or they would have had it activate a few seconds after the parchment had been opened rather than after it had been set down. That way no one but you would have seen it."

Harry put his arm around his brilliant friend and gave her a friendly hug. "Thanks Hermione. You're amazing!" Hermione blushed, and then beamed at Harry, knowing that he was sincere. He smiled back, and said, "Let's find the others."

After lunch Dumbledore came for their defense lesson. Unnoticed, he watched the four practicing silent moves using hand signs to communicate. They really did work well as a team. He had been happy when the Grangers had finally agreed to let Hermione participate in the apprentice program that he'd proposed. He felt certain that he'd designed enough flexibility into the program where their individual needs would be met.

"Good afternoon my friends. What are we rehearsing for this fine afternoon?"

Hermione told him of receiving the owl. She described in amazing detail the contents and style of the letter. Dumbledore was initially suspicious, but became less so after thinking about it. He asked, "Harry, could I trouble you to bring your pensive up here please?"

Harry went to get it. Dumbledore showed Hermione how to extract a copy of her memory and carefully place it into the bowl. Dumbledore watched very carefully. When he was done, he said, "I believe that the message is authentic. How are you planning on proceeding?"

Harry replied, "She will be a lot more difficult to capture, even if she is there. The cottage is likely to be warded. I think we should ask Tonks and Remus for help like we did with Malfoy. We don't know the area."

Dumbledore thought for a moment, and asked, "What did the owl that brought you the message look like?"

"It was an eagle owl, like the one that Draco Malfoy used."

Hermione understood and said, "What if the person who sent the message knows her? She might see the owl and assume that it was from that witch or wizard, and go out to get the message. Once she got out the door, we could get her just like we did with Marietta."

"Precisely."

Susan said, "We would have no way of knowing if there were others in the cottage. We would have to be extra careful when we go up to grab her."

Dumbledore fired a silver owl from his wand. A few minutes later Moody came to the door. Dumbledore explained what the four had in mind, and that they would need to practice covering techniques so they could approach a stunned Umbridge with a minimum of risk.

Hermione smiled at the two old wizards. "Why don't you two just get cell phones?" They all laughed, knowing that they young witch had a point.

Three hours later, the five of them came back from the park. As they came in, Molly said, "How nice that you were out enjoying the lovely day. Did you have fun at the park?"

"Yes, Mrs. Weasley," they said in unison. In truth, they were sore, bruised and exhausted. They went up to the third floor training room and took turns massaging each other's sore bodies.

After dinner, Dumbledore came back and asked Harry to visit with him. They went up to the study and Dumbledore sealed the doors. After they had both found a comfortable place to sit among the Grangers piles of blueprints and other papers and each had their favorite beverage, Harry asked, "How can I help you Professor?"

Dumbledore began, "I have asked Alastor to teach defense this year. I have a concern that I would like your opinion on." Seeing Harry nod, Dumbledore continued, "Do you think he might be a bit too intimidating for the younger students, especially the first years?"

Harry laughed, "Professor, he was intimating to my uncle. Of course in that case, I think he'd meant to be. What did you have in mind?"

"I was wondering if you might consider helping Alastor with the younger students, in the role of a Teaching Assistant. Many of the universities have them – An older student operating under the tutelage of a professor. In your case, I'm certain that the younger students would relate better to your style than Alastor's."

Harry knew that he'd been set up. "I'd be happy to help you professor. Is there a list of responsibilities?"

Dumbledore replied, "I just happened to have jotted a few down. I have the paper with me here. You would be responsible for the first, no make that the first and second year classes. That would be a total of four classes. We can schedule them so they do not interfere with either your individual lessons or the lessons with the witches. You would of course be paid half of a starting teacher's salary, though I'm certain that isn't of primary importance to you. You will have full responsibility for both years, though I would ask that you confer with me, or any of the other professors if you are in doubt over a specific issue. If that were agreeable, I would have you review the agreement and make any changes that you feel to be needed. After you sign it, I would like to bring in the others and talk a bit more with you regarding the logistics of the apprenticeship program. We can work out the cost of the program during the term."

After they had all gathered, Dumbledore conjured a chalkboard and the following schedule appeared. He gave them a moment to read it.

Schedule

Monday - Friday

5:30-6:30 - Physical conditioning

6:30 – 8:00 – Get dressed and have breakfast
Monday

8:00 - Noon

Hermione – Advanced Runes

Ginny – History of Magic

Susan - Healing

Harry – First year DADA

2:00 – 5:00 – Defense – Blocks & Shields

7:00 – 9:00 – Advanced Charms
Tuesday

8:00 – Noon

Hermione – Advanced Arithmancy

Ginny – Astronomy (classroom portion)

Susan - Healing

Harry – Second Year DADA

2:00 – 5:00 – Defense - Stealth

7:00 – 9:00 – Advanced Transfiguration

Wednesday

8:00 – Noon

Hermione - Finance

Ginny - Finance

Susan – Advanced Herbology

Harry – Finance

2:00 – 5:00 - Strategy

7:00 – 10:00 – Practical Potions
Thursday

Hermione – Independent Study

Ginny – Independent Study

Susan - Advanced Herbology

Harry - Leadership

2:00 – 5:00 - Attack Techniques

7:00 – 9:00 – Advanced Conjuring
Friday

8:00 – Noon

Hermione - Healing

Ginny - Healing

Susan - Mental Defenses

Harry – Mental Defenses

2:00 – 5:00

Hermione – Research

Ginny - Homework

Susan - Homework

Harry – Staff Meeting

Sunday Afternoon - DA

The schedules made sense both from the topics that they wanted to learn about together, and also topics that would meet their individual needs. After their individual questions were answered, Dumbledore continued.

“I have found suitable living space for each of you. The old student head of house scheme had a student from each house living in a common area. If you selected this option, each of you would have your own room and you would share a common room. Since you have a number of classes together, you would have the opportunity to work on them. Those rooms are located on the other side of the reception room that is off of the Great Hall. Harry, I believe that you were in that room, after having your name called to participate in the TriWizard Tournament.”

“If you would prefer, you could retain your rooms in Gryffindor and Hufflepuff towers instead. Harry, you would have the option of living quarters in the Staff wing if you would prefer. I need to talk with Molly for a moment. I will leave you to discuss this among yourselves, and I will return in ten minutes.”

Dumbledore returned a few minutes later. The teens had each voted on the quad arrangement. He told them that he felt it to be a better arrangement, as it would give them the chance to study and practice together.

“As such your status is no longer that of student. You will need to observe the regular rules with the following exceptions. You may

leave the school grounds on Saturdays between 6 AM and 9 PM. You may also leave as situations develop by notifying me in advance. You do not have a curfew. You may wear the gray apprentice robes in addition to the regular black work robes. You may have guests in your common room subject to their own curfews. I would like you to arrive at the castle by noon on 28 August. Here is a portkey. Hermione can help to shrink your trunks. You may wish to purchase a different trunk if you would like to bring a few more things. Your sleeping rooms are not as large as the fine ones in Harry's home, rather about 2/3 the size."

He let them think about his message for a moment answered a few other questions, and bid them goodnight.

Poppy had been checking up on the four both as a group and individually since the attack at the burrow. She was enjoying the opportunity to visit with each of them, and especially Susan and Harry. She was delighted that Susan had expressed an interest in being a Healer, and believed that the young witch possessed the kind and gentle nature that would give her a good rapport with the patients.

When she visited with Harry on Wednesday morning, she asked how things were going. Harry framed his answer around the witches, and their activities. Trying again, she asked, "And how are you?"

"It's been a summer of choices. My relatives were murdered. Suddenly I had the financial and legal means to take care of myself. I finally have clothing that fits. Ginny and Tonks came to live with me. I captured the man who betrayed my parents, and then Hermione and her parents came to live with me. I acquired some interesting skills, and then we captured a few Death Eaters. I lost two of my best friends, and gained some new ones. I killed five people. Professor Dumbledore offered me an apprenticeship, and a part time teaching position."

Harry had told her a number of things that she hadn't known, but hadn't really answered her question, or had he? Given what he'd just said, would she prefer that he say "I'm fine, no worries," or that he be

a bowl of emotions. She tried a different approach. "Harry, you've had a year that you wouldn't wish on anyone. What can I do to make your life easier?"

Almost by reflex, Harry said, "Take care of Ginny. She misses him so much."

"She seems to be quite comfortable in your arms Mr. Potter." With a coy grin on her face she added, "Granted that's a place that many young witches would love to be. Are you two happy together?"

A smile that Poppy had never seen in the young man flashed on his face. She knew that Harry was not articulate in expressing his emotions, but he'd answered her question perfectly. "I'm very happy for you Harry. I'll simply suggest that you use prevention where necessary, and be respectful of each other's feelings. She's a lovely young woman."

"Madam Pomfrey. I really appreciate that you've always taken such good care of me. Thank you very much."

Poppy smiled. "As I told you before Harry, I would follow you to the gates of Hell and back. You are an outstanding leader, and a wonderful man. I'm proud to call you my good friend."

"Me too. Thanks."

Tonks came by a few minutes later while the others were working with McGonagall. She had been gone a lot lately checking on leads regarding Umbridge and the other suspects. Harry was in an introspective mood. She led him up to her room. "Ready to get naked again?"

Harry didn't react. Instead he just started taking his shirt off.

Tonks put her hands on his shoulders, realizing that the last month of weight training had added muscle to the real Harry. Merlin he was put together. "Harry, what's wrong?"

"I was thinking about something."

She had him strip down to his boxers and she placed him face down on the massage table, rubbing healing massage oil into him. "So what were you thinking about?"

"Tonks, we trust each other right?"

"Right."

"So anything that we talk about stays in this room, right?"

"Right."

"Last June in the Department of Mysteries, after Bellatrix murdered Sirius, I chased her up into the lobby."

"You started to mention that before."

"Anyway, I wanted to kill her. I wanted to grind her into mush for what she did, but I couldn't do it right. I wanted to hurt her for what she did."

Tonks could see where this was going, but felt that Harry needed to say it, so she said nothing.

"I cursed her, but a few seconds later, she stood up and laughed at me."

"What were you having trouble with?"

"The Cruciatus curse."

Tonks said nothing for a moment. She didn't want to make light of an extremely troubling moment for her friend, but the reality was he didn't have the inert hatred in him to ever make it work, any more than she did. "What are you expecting me to say Harry? I'm not proud to hear that you tried it on her, but in the same circumstances I'd have tried the same thing myself. Torturing someone isn't a part of

who we are Harry, and I have the greatest respect for you, but we're not cold-blooded murders."

She flipped him over and continued working on his bruises and scrapes. "Harry, I never went looking to take someone's life. It doesn't mean that I wouldn't do it in a heartbeat if it came to that. It means I've been lucky to have not been placed in some of the horrible situations that you have. I don't think any of the living Aurors except maybe Kingsley or Moody have come close to being placed in the hurricanes that you've been thrust into."

"Harry spell work is a bit like vocabulary I suppose. If you take the time to learn enough words, you don't have to resort to vulgar language. You can hurt her or kill her a dozen different ways without using the unforgiveables." Harry was in rough shape. He had enough black and blue marks to have it look like he'd been beaten, yet she knew that he'd gotten them all in fights or training. She could see that he was aching. "Do you want me to finish?"

Harry looked into her crystal blue eyes. He shook his head. "No thanks, but thanks. I'm thirsty. Tonks?"

She looked up for a moment.

"Thanks Sis."

He failed to notice the tears welling in her eyes.

Harry got dressed and they walked down to the kitchen. Harry poured her a glass of wine and a butterbeer for himself. They went back into the library and Harry sealed the door so the parents wouldn't overhear something. "Tonks, can I ask you a favor?"

"Of course."

"Would you and Remus help us again this Friday? Like last time?"

The reality was that she too would follow this young man anywhere. She only asked one word, "Who?"

“Umbridge.”

“How?”

“We found her, or we think we did. Remus is surveying the area right now.”

“That’s the day after tomorrow. How can I help?”

Harry explained how they grabbed Marietta, and their concern that there might be someone else in the house.

Tonks composed her question for a moment. Regardless of his answer, she would help him. She just wanted to know. “Harry, are you trying to capture her or kill her?”

The next day, Flitwick and McGonagall gave them a combined lesson on transfiguring objects that were being thrown at them. It was yet another variation on the other exercises designed to improve their quickness. After lunch, they both wished the teens good luck and talked a bit about the next term’s lessons. After they left Remus went with them into the library and reviewed the diagrams and photos that he had taken. They would take a portkey to within a mile of the cottage and walk the rest of the distance. They would leave at 4:00 and hopefully be home before noon. Poppy and Dumbledore would be over by 5:00 AM. Harry would bring his cell phone and Remus would leave his in the Library in case they needed to call for backup.

If the Weasley or the Grangers happened to ask, Dobby and Winky would say that they had gone out on an errand with Remus.

They went to bed early in anticipation of an early morning.

A light rain was coming down when Harry woke that morning at 3:00. He took a quick shower and dressed in jeans, trainers and a sweatshirt. As he was getting dressed, Ginny woke up. She was so

beautiful, looking to Harry like an auburn haired angel. A few minutes later they met with the others with their knapsacks in the kitchen. Winky had made them a light breakfast of toast, juice and coffee. As always, Susan had a diet coke.

Ten minutes before four, Tonks and Remus arrived. They checked their gear, and took the portkey. Arriving, Remus said they were about a mile away from the cottage. Half way to the cottage, they were soaked by the rain. They hadn't used any spells to avoid setting off any of the wards that might be at the cottage. Like last time, Hermione was carrying the Eagle owl that Dumbledore had found for them. He'd had Harry show his memory of seeing the owl in a pensive, so he could find one that was a very close match.

Be 4:45 they were in position and well hidden. The cottage was dark, and they didn't know if anyone was there or not. They would have to wait and see.

They waited. The rain hadn't let up; in fact it was raining harder. Remus and Ginny were positioned by the back entrance, while Tonks and Hermione were on the side. Harry and Susan were by the front.

At 6:45 Hermione released the eagle owl. It flew to the front door by Harry and Susan and started tapping in the door. Tonks and Hermione started to move a few paces closer to the front as the owl was tapping on the door.

She tripped.

Chapter 18

“Shite”, whispered Hermione in a soft voice. Immediately she got on her feet and brushed the leaves off of her dragonhide pants. Looking over for the briefest second, the look on Tonk’s face seemed to say, It could happen to anybody. A second later, everyone froze. The sound of the front door of the cottage being unlocked could be heard.

Harry and Susan were standing stone still thirty feet from the front door. They had a good angle and good sightline. Harry had his wand pointed at the door, Susan’s at the window. Umbridge opened the door and took half a step out to get the owl. Just as she was reaching for the owl, she realized that it wasn’t Fudge’s. Harry’s aim was true. As she was taking a step back to slam close the door, she was slammed backwards from Harry’s spell.

Tonks and Hermione ran to the door, while Susan kept a watch on the window and Harry on the door. Tonks and Hermione got to the door. There was no movement. Hermione put the maniacals on Umbridge and was about to activate the port key. Tonks stunned her again for good measure.

Inside the cottage in the bathroom having just turned off the shower, Bellatrix Lestrange heard Umbridge fall at the door. Quickly putting on a pair of slippers she grabbed a wand and took a look out the window. She saw the indistinct shapes of disillusioned forms run by and she apparated to the front yard as Hermione activated the portkey with Umbridge.

Remus saw the naked form apparate a step behind Harry. Bellatrix aimed her wand at Tonks. “Avada Kedavra.” As the words were leaving her lips, Susan ran into her full force. Harry spun around, and in the same reflexive action that he had taken with Kreacher, Bella’s head left her body.

Tonks seeing the jet of green light shoot towards her dropped to the ground, hitting the side of her face on a bowling ball sized rock. Blood was everywhere. They’d only brought one portkey this time. Harry ran

to Tonks held her as tightly as he could and vanished. Remus ran up picking up the severed head, and vanished along with the others.

“POPPY!!!” yelled Harry appearing in the portkey. Blood was everywhere. He placed his palm over the gash to slow the flow as best he could but it wasn’t working very well. Pop, Pop, POP, Pop the others appeared. “Ginny get Pomfrey, now!!!.” She ran into the house as fast as she could.

There was a large pizza sized pool of blood on the garage floor when Pomfrey arrived. Immediately opening her bag, she opened four bottles of blood restorative potion and gave them to Susan to pour down Tonks’ throat.

Taking Harry’s hand off the wound, she was immediately sprayed with the young Auror’s blood. She cast a spell to temporarily stop Tonks’ heart and in seconds the spurting stopped. Poppy immediately repaired the artery that had been severed, and counted to ten to let it heal before it would accept pressure.

She cast another spell to restart her heart. Within as few seconds blood began oozing from the wound again, but at a much slower rate. Dumbledore apparated to St. Mungo’s and gathered several more mediwitches and four more units of blood restorative potion. Within three minute he would be back.

Meanwhile Susan had poured the last of the potions down Tonks’ throat, but it was obvious that what Pomfrey had brought wasn’t nearly enough. Tonks was beginning to convulse when they heard the POP, POP, Pop, Pop, pop of Dumbledore and the mediwitches.

“Hand Susan the potions,” commanded Pomfrey imperiously. The Mediwitches who had all been students of Pomfrey were amazed to see her out of the castle, and complied immediately. Susan, poured the fifth unit down Tonks’ throat.

One of the mediwitches saw the severed head, and immediately was violently ill. Another fainted. Susan poured the sixth unit down Tonks’

throat. She would gag when she had been filled up. Poppy had never used more than four units at a time before.

Dumbledore looked at the scene and noticed that the pool of blood was nearly the size of a door. Susan began pouring the seventh unit of blood replenishing potion into Tonks. Dumbledore requested that one of the mediwitches go back to St. Mungo's and return with more.

As Susan was half way with the seventh unit, Tonks' heart stopped. Poppy knew the incredible risk of casting a second heart starting spell in such a short period of time. Hermione began a chest massage that her parents had shown her. She told Harry to begin mouth to mouth.

Twenty seconds turned into thirty seconds, which turned into forty seconds. Tonks convulsed, and Hermione felt her heart restart. Harry blew a last breath into her mouth and felt her cough.

Pop, POP, POP. Kingsley, Hestia, and Amelia had arrived. Seeing everyone there soaked in blood, Amelia was immediately light headed. Kingsley luckily caught her and gently set her down. Seeing Umbridge move slightly Hestia stunned her again.

Dumbledore gave Remus another portkey and asked that he and Hestia collect the rest of Bellatrix. POP, Pop, The mediwitch and another came back with four more units of blood restorative potion.

A minute later, four of the mediwitches took Tonks away to St. Mungo's. She was in a coma, and needed the facilities of the facility. They wouldn't know her fate for at least a few hours.

POP, POP. Dobby and Winky appeared. "Harry Potter sir, what are wrong with eaches of you? Is you hurts?" The little elf was hysterical.

"Dobby, calm down," said Harry. "Where are the Grangers and the Weasleys? We need to go in to get cleaned up, and I don't want them to see us like this."

The little elf was so relieved to see that Harry and the others were Ok, he'd have done anything for him. "I's will lead them up to the study

and seal the door. Yous all run in, and Winkys will clean things up. Gives us two minutes.” POP, POP.

Kingsley took the portkey with Umbridge and Belatrix’s head to the holding cell. He would be back in a few minutes.

Winky opened the back door and the teens ran into the house. Five minutes later, they were showered and changed into clean clothing. Dobby had collected their bloody things, and then Winky cleaned the tracks that had been made on the floor.

The teens ran back out to the car park. A minute later, Dobby unsealed the study door, and the four parents came out of the study muttering about the strange little elf.

Meanwhile Dumbledore had filled Amelia in on the basics of the operation. She immediately returned to her office to bring a group of Aurors over to the cottage in Yorkshire. She left telling Dumbledore that he hadn’t heard the last of this.

Remus and Hestia apparated to the cottage. Somewhat surprised that no one else was there, they took a look inside the cottage. Umbridge had clearly been living there for some time. There was a single spare change of clothing for Bellatrix. Hestia conjured a body bag, and they placed the remains in the bag and sealed it. Hestia had placed the wands that she’d found in a bag marked evidence, and they left.

Seconds later, they were back at the garage. Hestia thanked Lupin and she took the body bag back to the holding cells.

At St. Mungo’s things were not going well for Tonks. After an hour, her heart had stopped again. She had to be respered to get it going again. She was still in a coma. The Healer in charge of her viewed her prognosis as grim.

At noon, Delores Umbridge was finally revived. She had been searched, and found herself with her ankle chained to a wall in a holding cell. The attendant who'd searched her and placed her in her cell wouldn't sleep well that evening.

Back at Grimmauld place, Molly and Arthur had been convinced to escort Dan and Emma to the construction site. Dan who had been getting a bit restless insisted that he drive, which was fine with Arthur who sat in the front seat asking an endless stream of questions.

While they were gone, Harry, Poppy, and the others went back to their rooms and cleaned up properly. A half hour later they met Dumbledore, and Amelia in the library. For a half hour the teens took turns telling their parts of the story. Initially Amelia was somewhat angry. Halfway through, the anger turned to admiration, which turned to absolute awe as she came to realize how well planned and executed that the capture was. She was amazed when Susan told of pushing Lestrage to have her curse go astray, saving the life of Tonks. When Harry told her how he'd double apparated Tonks to safety, she was amazed. Not more than one in several hundred witches or wizards could double apparate someone.

Amelia reminded them that they'd broken several laws during the day, including trespassing. Harry countered that they'd received written permission from the property owner. Amelia was about to argue with him, when Harry took out his bank draft book, and confessed to illegally apparating Tonks. "Director Bones, I fully admit that I double apparated one time today and I only have a single apparation license. What is the fine?"

"Mr. Potter in lieu of a fine, I will request that you go to St. Mungo's tomorrow, and spend the day with Auror Tonks. Miss Granger, for endangering the life of an Auror. I will request that you pay for dinner this evening. Susan, for administering blood replenishing potion without a permit, I will request that..." She couldn't keep a straight

face any longer, and began laughing. "I am so utterly proud of each of you."

Dumbledore said, "Indeed, they have done well this summer. Director, I believe that my Apprentices have other responsibilities to look after and will leave the further capture of the Death Eaters this summer in your capable hands. As it is Friday, I think an evening out will definitely be in order. I believe that it is Miss Weasley's turn to select the venue. Minerva and Poppy both said that they could come this time. The Apprentices do have some last minute shopping to do tomorrow, and as soon as they are done, I'm certain that Mr. Potter will go to St. Mungo's and sit with Auror Tonks. I am requesting that they arrive at the castle no later than noon on Wednesday the 28th. I would like Harry to arrive a day earlier, as he also has other responsibilities to look after."

Dumbledore was ecstatic that Bellatrix had been defeated. In many ways he saw her as being nearly as big a threat to ordinary witches and wizards as Riddle himself. He pulled out a list that had the books and materials that they would need and handed it to Harry.

Amelia said, "It will be several days before the news of Umbridge's capture and LeStrange's defeat will be announced. I ask that you please do not tell anyone at this time. Please don't say anything about the cottage or Fudge either. Please tell Mr. Lupin the same thing. I need to assess Fudge's involvement and take appropriate action."

Hermione was sitting on the floor when Harry found her several hours later. She'd been crying for at least an hour. Harry sat down next to her and held her hand. "What's wrong Mione?" he asked.

A flood of tears fell on Harry as Hermione buried her face into His neck. Harry put his arms around his friend, and held her for a minute. "There's nothing to be ashamed about. You lived. I lived. Ginny and Susan lived. I'm sure that Tonks is being well cared for. There was no way to have known for sure that Bellatrix was in the cottage with Umbridge. Mione, it could have been loads worse. She could have

cursed you or me or any of us before we'd seen her. It was her bad luck that she never learned to apparate properly." He held her for a few minutes.

Finally Hermione looked up and said, "Thanks Harry. You always take good care of me. I really appreciate it but Harry can you leave now please?"

Confused, Harry asked, "Sure. What's up?"

"I want to get ready for dinner. Everyone's going."

Harry went back to his room and opened his dresser. He took eight small boxes out of his top dresser drawer, and placed them in his robes pocket. At ten minutes to six Susan came down to the entertainment room. Amelia, Molly, Arthur, Minerva, Poppy, Remus, Dan and Emma were already there. A minute later, Ginny and Hermione came down. The teens looked gorgeous.

Harry took the little boxes out and gave one to each of the women. "I had these made for each of you, and thought that this would be a great time to give them to you. The women opened the boxes. They contained the diamond stud earrings that Mundungus had made for Harry weeks before. They were undeniably beautiful. Harry received eight hugs as the women each excused themselves to put them on.

They took a portkey to The Pointed Hat in Kent. Dinner was kind of quiet. There were big secrets between the different people. Harry invited both Dan and Emma as well as Molly and Arthur to stay at his home as long as they liked. The Grangers' home would be done about the middle of October, whereas the Weasleys were just starting to consider what to do. After dinner they all walked around the area for a half hour. The weather had cleared, and it was a delightful evening.

After they got back, Molly and Arthur asked to speak with Harry in private. Harry was somewhat nervous, not knowing what they wanted to talk with him about. Stalling, Harry thought of Winky and the little elf appeared carrying a tray with a bottle of the Napoleon brandy, glasses, tea, and two butterbeers. After they had each found

something, Arthur said, "Harry we would like you to have this back. Harry recognized the small case as the Gringotts key case that he'd given Ron. A moment later, Harry realized that they weren't just giving Harry the box, rather the contents of Ron's vault.

Before Harry could protest, Arthur continued, "Harry, Ron didn't make a Will, but we're certain that giving this to you would be consistent with his wishes." He forced the case into Harry's hand.

Harry came back, "Mr. And Mrs. Weasley please don't do this. I honestly don't need the money, and there are better things to do with it. Please consider doing one or all of the following instead. First, it might be good if there was a fund set up to create emergency portkeys that would transport witches or wizards to a safe place, like the Leaky Cauldron. At a galleon each, 5,000 Galleons could just about cover it, and make a great remembrance for Ron and Luna. Another idea would be a Quidditch fund for purchasing school brooms for all of the houses. I'm sure that Ron would like that. Last, please use most of the money to rebuild your home. Home meant so much to Ron. He talked about it all the time. Please do those things instead."

There were tears in Molly's eyes. "Harry, we love you so much. You've been so good to us." She pulled Harry into a smothering hug.

Harry hugged her back. "Mrs. Weasley, I could never repay the kindness that you've shown me over the years. Thank you." She accepted the box back from the man that she desperately hoped would become her son in law.

Harry woke up at two the next morning. Susan and Hermione were both sleeping on the floor by the sofa. Ginny was curled up next to him. It felt comforting to have the three women near him where he knew they were safe. The rhythm of their breathing indicated that they were all sleeping restfully. Yet he felt like he was missing something.

An image of a nine year old Tonks flashed into his mind. Harry dismissed it as a cute thought. He worried about his big sis so much, hoping that she'd be OK. He dozed off. Suddenly his scar hurt as bad as it ever had. Riddle was at the cottage, and found Belatrix's things. He left the cottage and it exploded into flames. He apparated to the cottage next to it. A moment later it was in flames, and the next and the next. A car drove nearby, and he banished it into the sea. Villagers were running up to see what was going on. Soon they were screaming. Harry was screaming too.

"Harry, Harry, wake up." The three women were shaking him. Each was wrapped in a blanket. A moment later Mrs. Weasley was there asking what was wrong.

Susan said, "We heard him screaming and came in to see what had happened." Harry ran into his bathroom and was sick. A minute later the entire house was up. Harry was still in his bathroom sitting on the slate floor. He slowly got up and ran cold water on his face. How many people had he killed? Harry wasn't sure that he wanted to know.

Harry, may I come in? It was Arthur. He opened the door and helped Harry clean himself up. "Molly, could you get a set of clothes for Harry?" A moment later, the door opened, and Molly handed Arthur a set of boxers and a sweatshirt. He set it on the floor by the sink. "I'll let you get yourself changed Harry." We'll be outside if you need anything.

"Please ask Ginny to get my cell phone Mr. Weasley." Arthur left, and Harry removed his soiled pajamas. Ginny knocked on the door and handed Harry his phone. She squeezed his hand and closed the door.

Harry called Amelia and explained to her what he'd seen. Within minutes, six Aurors and twice as many Obliviators had been dispatched to Williston Road in Yorkshire. Harry opened the bathroom door and found his room empty. Hermione had quietly vanished the extra blankets.

Harry's mind thought back to his early summer conversation with Madam Pomfrey'

"I know this much Harry - We are at war. People die in battle...I am suggesting that you leave the blame for their deaths on the shoulders of their killers where it belongs"

The war was not over. It was still heating up. They could take away Riddle's followers, but he would find others, or do the killing himself. He had to be stopped.

As the teens and the Weasleys were having a noisy breakfast the next morning, Emma came in carrying Hermione's dragon hide armor. "Hermione, what's this?" An uncomfortable silence fell over the table.

Chapter 19

Susan said, "It's a set of exceptionally high quality, lightweight body armor. Harry was kind enough to get each of us a set. It will deflect most curses, and probably stop most small arms bullets."

Emma was stunned by the response. All she could reply was, "Oh. And why would you need such a thing?"

Hermione said, "Because there are killers out there who don't care whose lives that they ruin. Because I want to live to grow up to see this war over. Because Harry cared enough about us to want to keep us safe. Because I want to have a..." Ginny and Susan had given their brainy friend a hug. Hermione burst into tears.

Emma was embarrassed. "Hermione, I had no idea. I thought it was some kinky Goth thing that you'd gotten interested in. I'm sorry for having jumped to conclusions. Harry, we didn't mean to..."

Susan came back, "Mrs. Granger, Harry is an extremely wealthy person. He can afford body armor or cell phones or the new technology DVD players. I asked Auntie about them the other day. She said they were just invented last year. Only a few fancy stores like Harrods even have them. I'm grateful that he has taken such good care of us this summer."

Harry has getting embarrassed. "Please forget about it, Mrs. Granger, please. Breakfast is getting cold. Please sit down."

Emma set the dragon hide down and joined in. Dan asked, "What is it?"

Ginny answered, "Hungarian Horntail."

Dan didn't understand. "What's Hungarian Horntail?"

Harry answered "Dragonhide sir. Dragonhide is magical enough to stop most curses."

Dan said, "I had no idea."

"It works really well."

"No. I meant I had no idea about dragons."

Harry smiled, "I understand Sir. Hermione could find you a book on them in the library."

Dan was amazed. He asked, "When did they go extinct?"

Ginny replied, "They're not extinct, Mr. Granger. My brother Charlie works with them in Romania. Harry fought one two years ago. Our friend Hagrid..."

After breakfast the teens got ready to go to Diagon Alley. Molly went with them to help with the shopping. They went to Madam Malkin's first. Harry had each of the women get four sets of gray robes, and another set for going out someplace. She had them select different fabrics, for warmer or colder days and had extra inside pockets put in them and a matching cloak to go with them. Harry quietly asked Susan to pick out some extra things as she didn't have anywhere near the wardrobes that the other women had acquired over the summer. Harry paid the bill and they went to Flourish & Blotts. Harry had quite a list that Dumbledore had given him, both for their own use but also for the first and second year students. Hermione outdid them all by selecting nearly a hundred books, as many as Susan and Ginny combined. Harry asked that the books be delivered to them at Hogwarts. There was no way that they could carry nearly three hundred books around for the day.

The women wanted to do some more shopping and Harry wanted to go visit Tonks. He asked Hermione and Ginny to please pick out another trunk for him, preferably one like Moody had with the different compartments. Molly worried about Harry going off by himself. Harry assured her that he could take care of himself.

Harry found the entrance to St. Mungo's and asked to see Auror Tonks. The attendant recognized him and a huge smile came to her

face. "Hi Harry. It's me Jill Larson. I was in Hufflepuff. I graduated the year that you won the tri wizard tournament. I'll get the Head Healer."

The Head Healer came. Harry thought that it might have been years since the woman had smiled. "Good morning Mr. Potter. So you're the young man who kept the young Auror alive long enough to get some blood restorative potion poured into her?" Harry nodded, noting that her nametag read Crabtree.

"Mr. Potter as you probably know, she effectively lost all of her blood. Healer Pomfrey's report indicated that she was given seven pints of restorative potion. That means that should she live, at least for the time being, the young woman will have lost all of her magic. She's in a coma, but her heart hasn't stopped since..."

"Two o'clock," said Harry. "I could tell when it happened. Tonk's is sort of my big sister."

The thinnest of smiles crept onto the old healer's face. "She's extremely lucky to have you in her life. Come this way. Director Bones left word that you could visit her anytime that you wanted to."

An attendant was in her room, as Tonks was on the critical care watch. An Auror that Harry had seen before was sitting outside the door. She nodded to Harry in recognition, but didn't say anything. Crabtree told the attendant to leave them be, that the young man was not to be disturbed or questioned, and that he could visit any time that he wished. They left and closed the door behind them.

Tonks looked tiny curled up in the hospital bed. She was hooked up to a tube in her arm. A pinkish liquid was in a bag suspended from the stand. For a few minutes, Harry sat in the little chair where the attendant had been. He held Tonk's arm. She felt like she was freezing. After a minute, Harry walked around the bed and lay behind her like he did with Ginny on the sofa. He held her tight. After a few minutes, she felt a bit warmer to him.

Harry held her for a half hour before he felt her move. He continued to hold her for another hour like he'd held Ginny at night. She began to feel restless in the bed, gently thrashing like she was fighting to

wake up. Harry nuzzled the back of her neck and a minute later, he heard her gasp for breath and jerk.

Harry got up and called the attendant. She took a look in the room and went running to find Crabtree. Harry felt strangely tired, and sat down in the attendant's chair. Crabtree looked over to Tonks, and asked Harry, "What did you do to her?"

Embarrassed at his behavior, Harry said, "She felt cold, I just held her for a bit. I didn't mean to..."

But at that moment they heard a whispered voice, "Harry?"

It was Tonks!

She'd woken up!!! They scooted Harry out of the room while several Mediwitches were summoned to come in. The Auror sitting outside sadly asked Harry, "What happened in there?"

Harry replied, "She woke up."

The Auror was overjoyed. "I was here on death watch! She wasn't expected to live through the day. I'll be right back. Can you watch her for me? I need to go tell..." and she ran off.

Harry stuck his head back in the room. Tonks had thrown up, and the bed sheets were soaked. He sat back on the Auror chair while the attendants, put her in a different gown and changed the sheets.

Ten minutes later, they walked out of the room, and Healer Crabtree said, "Mr. Potter, Auror Tonks is asking for you. Please go see her."

Harry went back in. Tonks was awake, but looking very weak.

"Hi Sis."

Tonks turned her head to see him better. Her color was a bit warmer. Her crystal blue eyes met his emerald eyes, and they just looked at each other for a bit.

“Thanks Harry. Please hold me for a bit longer.”

Harry held her arm. “Not like that. Like you did before. Please?”

The door was shut. Harry walked over to the other side of the bed, and held her. She melted into him, rocking back and forth. Fifteen minutes later there was a gentle knock in the door. Harry quickly got up and opened the door. It was Amelia, Hestia, Kingsley, Dumbledore, and the Auror who’d been sitting outside. Harry noticed that her name badge said, McKinney.

Amelia looked inside, Tonks was trying to sit up in the bed, but having a hard time.

“Well done Harry. Healer Crabtree had told us to expect to lose Tonks in the next few hours.”

Dumbledore looked in and said, “You seemed to have encouraged her to do otherwise.” His eyes twinkled and there was a great smile on his face.

Just then Hermione, Ginny, Susan, and Molly came by. “How is she doing?” asked Ginny.

“Let me guess, it’s that saving people thing. He did it again, didn’t he?” asked Hermione.

“It certainly seems that way. Miss Granger,” said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. “Miss Tonks, doubtless need her rest. I will ask Mr. Potter to be home within the hour. I’m certain that you can visit her again in a day or two.”

An hour later, Harry left. Tonks was sleeping and had normal color. Her prognosis was upgraded all the way up to excellent. Dumbledore had made him a portkey to use to get home. Harry went home and took a nap on the couch. The women all sat on the floor by his couch,

each reading a book, listening to Bach CDs. softly playing on the player.

Harry woke up at four that afternoon, feeling much better. Hermione found him and said that her parents had asked to take him and her out for dinner that evening. Dan and Emma had found an Asian restaurant not more than a few miles away that they wanted to try. After they parked and were seated, Hermione excused herself to use the loo. After she'd walked away, Emma said, "Harry, we'd like to ask you a question."

Harry, looked up from the menu and said, "Go ahead."

Dan asked, "Harry, have you been intimate with our daughter?"

Momentarily stunned Harry replied. "Of course not, she's my very best friend. I'd never."

Dan said, "Harry, think about what you just said. Emma's my very best friend. That's why I married her."

"But I love Ginny."

Emma said, "Harry, it almost impossible to truly love someone at sixteen. I'm not saying that you don't have very strong feeling about Ginny, or Susan, or anyone else. We know that you have a lot on your plate right now. I'm observing that at the moment, at least three or more women are in love with you and would do absolutely anything that you asked them to. We simply know that you are too much of a gentleman to ever take advantage of anyone's feelings. I know that Dan and I love you Harry, and I'm absolutely certain that the Weasleys, that poor Auror, and your Instructors do too. It's an interesting gift Harry. Use it well."

Harry said, "I think I understand what you're saying, and I promise you, I'd never take advantage of Hermione, or any of the others."

Dan said. "We know that, and thank you Harry. You're a good man."
Changing the subject he asked, "What looks good for dinner?"

Hermione came back. "Harry, did you see the paper today?"
Yorkshire Village Destroyed

Seventeen people were killed or missing in a strange series of fires along Williston Road in Yorkshire County this morning. Officials say that seven homes were destroyed in what must have been a series of gas explosions. Utility workers are at a loss to explain how it could have happened. Officials say a car was blown a quarter mile by one of the blasts, killing the driver.

Emma, asked, "Harry was that the nightmare that you had this morning?"

Harry nodded, tears in his eyes. "I saw him do it. I called Director Bones. I'm not yet strong enough to stop him."

Emma replied, "Harry, that's what the Aurors are for. You don't need to worry about him."

Hermione was silent, aching for her friend.

The next morning, Molly and Arthur asked to take Harry out for an early dinner. He was dreading hearing another with my daughter conversation. He spent much of the day packing and getting ready for school. Harry refilled the house money jar for Winky and asked that they split their time between the castle and Grimmauld place after the new term started. He gave them a list of things around the house that they could work on to keep busy with.

Harry and the teens went to visit Tonks at St. Mungo's. He invited her to stay at Grimmauld place after she got out of St. Mungo's, saying that the Weasleys and Winky would be happy to help her. She was looking much better, though Healer Crabtree said that it would be six to eight weeks before she could safely return to work.

They each hugged her and got ready to leave. As they were going, Tonks said, "Wait a second. I know that I owe you all my life. I can't possibly repay you, but I did want to tell you how much I appreciate it."

That reminded Harry. He took out the little box that he had in his pocket with the diamond earrings. Susan and Ginny helped her put them on. Tonks smiled, and noticed that the other witches each had them. Sure beats the Dark Mark. "Thank you all again." They each gave her a hug, and she gave Harry a kiss on the cheek.

They got back at two. Harry felt a bit tired, and went to the entertainment room to sit for a few minutes. Hermione put his chamber trunk in his room for him. Ginny sat down by Harry asking, "What's wrong?"

Harry replied, "I don't know. I've been a bit tired the last few days." She got him a butterbeer. A few minutes later, Harry felt better.

Mrs. Weasley found them at three, asking where they wanted to go for dinner. Harry and Ginny looked at each other. Ginny said, "Anywhere is fine Mum. We just like to be with you and Dad."

Molly suggested, "How about the pub that's down four streets. The weather is nice, and we could have a nice walk."

At the pub, Mr. Weasley ordered them a beer. They had toad in the hole and mashed potatoes. It wasn't Harry's favorite, reminding him of his uncle, but he loved spending time with Ginny's parents. Ginny gave her Dad a hard time, telling him not to take Harry's house apart while they were gone.

Molly asked about the armor. Harry replied, "Remember the prophecy that the Order was guarding for most of last year?" Arthur nodded, not certain that he really wanted to hear more. Harry said, "Without getting into details, it concerned me. All I wanted to do was to provide the people around me with a little more protection if I could."

Molly said, "Harry that's very thoughtful, but you should leave it to the Aurors to handle. They've been quite effective this summer, capturing Pettigrew, Malfoy, that Edgecombe girl, and defeating those Aurors who attacked our home. Why they even got..."

"Molly dear," Arthur said warningly. "That's Order business that hasn't been announced."

Ginny was about to launch into a tirade, but Harry squeezed her knee under the table and said, "You're right Mrs. Weasley. I just wanted to keep Ginny safe."

"That's very kind of you Harry. We hope that you have a great year at school. You four are so fortunate to have been selected for an Apprentice program like this. Please take good care of Ginny, and don't go wandering off."

"I will, Mrs. Weasley." He wasn't sure what he's agreed to.

"And you," she said turning to Ginny. "I expect you to study hard, and be on your best behavior."

"I will, Mum."

"Did you both get everything that you need for the year?"

"We think so. We'll owl you if we need anything. Thanks for dinner. We really enjoyed it."

On the way back they talked about the summer, and some of the lessons that they'd learned. Harry pleaded with Mrs. Weasley to let Winky do the cooking and the housework.

Halfway home Harry had an idea. He told Ginny's parents that they would meet them back at the house in a half hour. Molly and Arthur continued walking home.

Harry held Ginny tightly and they apparated to the park behind Grimmauld place. Ginny asked, "What was that all about?"

Harry replied, "I dunno. I just wanted to be alone with you." He leaned Ginny up against a large tree and began gently kissing her. Seconds later, she drew him closer feeling each other's passion.

A minute later, all Ginny could say was "Wow." Her legs felt like mush.

Harry smiled at her. Walking her to one of the benches, Harry thanked her for a great day. Ginny replied, "It was weird shopping and not going into any of the second hand shops. Thanks"

Harry felt like a worm. He'd never meant to embarrass her. He said, "I always thought you looked great, in everything that you wore. I was no fashion mannequin either with all of Dudley's cast offs."

Ginny lied, "I never noticed Harry, but you look great in everything that you have now." The truth was, she'd been continually shocked that a famous wizard like Harry would be dressed in rags. She'd never known the extent of his abuse and neglect at the hands of his relatives until this summer.

They went back and Harry finished his packing. He'd loaded about half of his clothing and quite a few books out of his library into the multi-chambered trunk. Dobby or Winky could bring him anything that he needed within a minute if he asked them.

They stayed up late listening to CDs, playing Hearts and enjoying each other's company. Everyone found a minute to privately thank Harry for letting them stay for the summer. Finally it was time to say goodnight. Hermione's parents went up first followed by the girls.

Harry was about to get up himself, when he noticed that Molly was crying. "What's wrong Mrs. Weasley?" She replied, "Seeing you four get ready to go off to school got me thinking about Ron. I miss him so much." She buried her face in Harry's shoulder. Harry could feel her pain. She was so sad.

Harry held her. "I miss him too, Mrs. Weasley. I miss him too."

Arthur came back from the kitchen, and said, "Come on, Molly. We need to get to bed. Good night Harry." They left to go to their room.

Harry dragged himself up the stairs.

Harry woke up at three. Covering the others up with their blankets, he went upstairs to the weight room, and lifted weights for an hour. After that, he went outside and jogged around the park several times, picking up speed as he went. After three laps he stopped and rested for a moment then walked for a bit to cool down. The sun was almost up and it looked like it would be another great day.

Harry went back into the house and sat in the entertainment room, staring at the fireplace. He thought of Sirius, and remembered Dumbledore's words from long ago. Those that we love and remember, never really leave us. Harry now knew them to be true. He'd never forget Sirius and his wicked sense of humor. He'd never forget an eleven-year-old redhead asking him if the seat adjacent to him was taken. He'd never forget Luna reading the Quibbler upside down asking about Stubby Boardman."

Soon the others joined him. First the teens started giggling that he really needed a shower, than the parents. Harry went up and showered. He got dressed wearing his Dragonhide vest, jeans Dr. Martins and a blue oxford shirt. After breakfast he closed his trunk and shrunk it like Hermione had shown him. He gave each of them a hug, shook Dan and Arthur's hand, then got a kiss from each of the women, noticing that they each were wearing their diamond studs. He gave Dobby and Winky a hug each, and it was time to go. Harry walked out to the car park and waved before he apparated to Hogsmede station.

It had been a summer that none of them would ever forget.

End.

A/N

If you'd be interested in having their adventure continue into the school year, please let me know.

Susan watched as the other two began packing their trunks. Ginny carefully packed her silk knickers, lace bras and the beautiful silk sleepwear that Harry'd got her. Her Auntie still seemed to think that her Grand Niece would prefer Scooby Doo briefs to Victoria's Secret, or something as nice as what Ginny had received, but time would correct that..

The summer had been fantastic, but she knew that the real adventure was just beginning. In a few days they would be back at the castle taking the specialized tutoring class that had been arranged. She was proud that as a Hufflepuff, she had been deemed worthy to participate.

A/N

The Summer of Choices may be over but life is just beginning for The Four Apprentices, which will follow them through the next year. The teens are getting older, growing their skills, and getting more daring both in and out of their rooms. Harry and the others will grow to become the heros that they were destined to become.

I made a slight correction to chapter 15. Death Eater Mrs. Flint was killed in the raid at the Weasley residence, not Death Eater Mrs. Malfoy.